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MEMOIRS OF

MRS.
LETITIA BOOTHBY

MEMOIRS
OF
MRS. LÆTITIA BOOTHBY.

MEMOIRS OF MRS. LÆTITIA BOOTHBY.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

EDITED BY
CLARK RUSSELL.

"The moral of the tale I sing
(A posy for a wedding-ring)
In this short verse will be confined,
Love is a jest and youth a wind."

—Prior.



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PREFACE.

THESE memoirs were begun and ended in the last two months of the year 1775, when my Lady Cheriton's absence from home gave me leisure to prosecute my task. I undertook it with eagerness ; for I was never to know how much of my past my lady might come to discover. In this apprehension I determin'd to set down a plain and sincere narrative of my conduct whilst I was at Dr. Aston's (embellished for her diversion with notices of the distinguish'd characters I met at Wimpole Street), conceiving that the best remedy against the prejudice any discovery would raise in her, would lie in an account of

my birth, my father's character and misfortunes, and the necessity I was under of making my fortune by my own arts.

But unless discovery of my past (which God avert!) occasion an immature betrayal of these memoirs, I design that posterity alone shall have the reading of them ; for I have no desire the history of my life should be known, until the grave has put it beyond the power of the uncandid to injure me.



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MEMOIRS
OF
MRS. LÆTITIA BOOTHBY.

—o—
CHAPTER I.

*Of Mr. Boothby; his birth, parentage, education,
and marriage.*

I HAVE always had an aversion to those soft and sentimental tales of love, with which, from time to time, writers of both sexes have entertained the town; for I could never find it in me to sympathise with love that is fed with pap, and bristles with milk-teeth through so great a number of pages as some of these writings contain.

For my part, I believe we should be diverted with a great many less such stories were the writers who compose them to freely avow the

truth, and set down an uncoloured version of what befel them or their heroes. We should be moved indeed with less fine speeches, but we should be instructed with more veracity ; and what tender emotions our sensibilities might have to forego, would be balanced by the sharpening of our judgments and by the enlargement of our understandings. How often are *Pancharilla's* eyelashes made to sparkle with the crystal drops of despair, when we are sensible that *Strephon's* unkindness could never have excited her to tears ! How often is *Flavia's* fleecy care made to listen to her tender complaints, when sure her swain's behaviour has been too moderate to provoke a sigh !

Nor have I patience with those writers who seem to want the heart to speak out plainly all that experience has writ on their memory, but must needs fall to devices beneath the dignity of truth ; dissembling where candour should appear, and embellishing where the plainest outlines would prove most profitable. The life of every man and woman is a history that demands, and surely deserves, as undecorated an account as the history of a nation. If this be blinked there never can be any profit to arise from the setting down of what a man has

thought and done. Methinks truth should ever be painted as a naked beautiful female, with such grace in her air and such dignity in her eyes as will breed a sense of modesty in all who behold her. Yet there are who treat her as a wench of whom but only a little of her person may be seen ; who, feigning a modesty that is not in nature, set her up in hoop and sacque, and yet leave exposed more to shock a real decency than were she left with no clothing on but her beauty.

To show my contempt for this kind of history, I shall write as freely as if I was a penitent making confession to a priest ; and though some actions of mine, which I shall have to recount, may appear odious, yet the ingenious reader will set against my past sins this expiation of confession, by which, if she be judicious, she shall not fail to profit.

My grandfather on the male side was a parson, who held a small living in Northamptonshire, of which the revenues, proving insufficient for his wants, set him upon searching for a wife, possessed of such a fortune as should prove their support. Having been sometimes admitted on occasions when poor relations or mean company were present, to the table of the squire of the

parish, he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Margery Dowler, a decent, grave woman, of no principle, but of good reputation, who, from the vigilance and ability she had manifested as waiting-maid to the squire's third wife, had been raised by her to the dignity of housekeeper.

Parson Boothby having with much pains learnt that she had saved, out of her various plunder, a sufficient fortune to keep them in comfort for some years, writ a private letter in which he confessed his love (which he swore was only for her person and mind), and humbly concluded by entreating her to become his wife.

The many uncommon qualifications she must have concentered in herself to enable her to lay by so great a sum of money, while preserving her reputation for honesty, and in situations of which the rewards were small and subjected to the caprices of her employers, rendered the parson fearful lest she should think herself meat for his betters, and reject his offer with contempt; but finding her agreeable to his request, and not above becoming the wife of a clergyman, he married her in 1715; the witnesses to their union being the butler and a natural son of the squire.

Mr. Boothby, the only offspring of this union, was born on the seventh day of June, in the year 1719, that being the day on which the great Mr. Addison died ; a circumstance which Mr. Boothby would always reflect on with complacence, and mention as a singular instance of the compensations made by nature ; though how nature could compensate mankind for the loss of so great a moralist by introducing Mr. Boothby among them, is not readily conjectured. Nor are my sensibilities as a daughter willing to accept the view once expressed by the satyrick Will Gentleman, who protested, that the only motive he could witness in this working of nature, was her resolution to prove to mankind that as, like a great poet, she was capable of the highest flights in the sublime, so was she also capable of the meanest strokes in the ridiculous.

I have heard of no prognosticks having heralded my father's appearance on the stage of this world ; though I make no doubt but that soon after his birth, an ingenious mind might have witnessed many prognosticks to herald his future career. My grandfather being resolved to spend his wife's money, that should he die before her, he

might leave her no other charm than her face and person (which were not of the daintiest) with which to tempt another suitor, found that his wife's fortune, even when conjoined to his own revenue, was not sufficient for his habits, which he had bred to luxury by taking no concern in the future; and so suffered his son to go at large, only paying the parish clerk with glasses of strong waters, to impart the alphabet and the forms of figures, and then letting him take as much reading as he might think good. But the boy had a mind fervid with imagination and active with a love of mischief which carried him to a wider extent of knowledge than was thought on at the embarkation; as the falcon in chasing his quarry, oft rises to a great height in the pursuit, whence he may enter, if he will, on a boundless survey of the prospects, plantations, groves, hills, and sinking dales below. He discovered at first, as he has often confessed, a wonderful excitement in robbing orchards, in casting stones at windows, in breaking down fences for the pent-up cattle to escape, in choking up fountains, and in killing ducks with sticks. But hearing from certain playfellows that there were books to be had

in which exploits of greater variety and of more daring character were to be read, he made shift to possess them, and was thus insensibly led into a course of reading which, commencing at a foul source, gradually conducted him to a clearer stream, thence to the wide river, and presently to the ocean of knowledge.

The severity of his father's selfishness, Mr. Boothby now entering upon manhood, his parts being good, his imagination brisk, and his opinions intelligent, set him upon resolving to seek his own fortune. He imparted his intention to his father, who, so far from dissuading him from attempting the perilous deeps and shallows of the world, did not even seek to ascertain what scheme of life he had formed; but giving him twenty guineas, bade him know he must expect no more, and so gave him his blessing.

With this narrow fortune, Mr. Boothby started for London, which he reached on the first day of April, in the year 1739.

Of his life at this period I know little, for the accounts are vague and the memorials confused. I believe that he took to the stage, and that he acted the character of *Bardolph* in the "First Part

of King Henry IV.," at the theatre in Portugal Street, whither Mr. Giffard had at that time removed with his company of comedians from the theatre in Goodman's Fields. But he did not occupy the stage long; for like the late Sir J^{hn} H^{ll}, of whom the ingenious Kit Smart wrote, he was damned in every part he undertook, and was forced to retire, though not with any discredit, since history gives many examples of the greatest and most improved geniuses having trod the stage and abandoned it without incurring any insolence of contempt or accusation of general incompetence.

The great success of Mr. Garrick at Goodman's Fields, in the year 1741, seems to have occasioned once more the letting loose of his desires towards the stage; but now he came forward, not as an actor, but as the author of a comedy in five acts, intituled, "A Wife A-la-Mode; or, The Devil with Two Horns," a performance of very great merit, the dialogue being natural, the sentiments just, and the conceits copious, unaffected, and never violent. It was repeated to him, indeed, that Mr. Wilkes, the famous patriot, had praised this piece as a work

of great promise; and that he had quoted as an example of its excellence the retort by *Dampier* on *Cælia's* airy joke upon his moodiness : "*Madam, we wits are like razors that have to be ground in order to be kept sharp; and if we are often silent in company, it is because we perceive the value of æconomy too plainly to part with more than we are compelled to lose when we bring our brains to the grindstone of our wants.*"

Mr. Rich having looked into this play, acted it at Covent Garden : but the sprightly performance of Mrs. Woffington as *Cælia* could not save the piece against the ill-temper of Mr. Ryan; who, having quarrelled with Mr. Rich before he came on, was so disconcerted that he lost his spirits, and as the odious tumult of the cat-calls rose, sunk into many meannesses, and procured the piece to be hissed off before the middle of the fourth act. Mr. Boothby, however, was more fortunate with the booksellers, from whom he received fifty guineas for his play; yet not before he had struggled hard for the customary hundred, which the rapacious Mr. Osborne, with many imprecations, vowed he would not give, as the piece had been damned.

During this time Mr. Boothby had often been in great want, heavily weighed down by the pressing care of supporting the day that was passing over him, and languishing under great dejection of spirits. Being keen of observation, and quick to present in an agreeable form the various experiences which he drew from the life he was then pursuing, he was enabled to earn a precarious subsistence by writing for the journals; and he has oftentimes pointed out to me, with a kind of triumph, as manifesting the superiority of his will over his spirit, certain tart lampoons and pleasant poems in the *London Magazine*, and notably in the *Craftsman* and the *Champion*, writ when his hand hath been enfeebled by want, and when hunger hath raised such an outcry as had almost drowned the voice of his imagination.

Yet did not his industry suffice for his support. He wrote to his father, humbly petitioning him to send a few guineas; but no reply was vouchsafed. His spirit taking fire at this neglect, he swore never again to apply to so inhuman a person; then casting his eyes about him, he too plainly perceived that a life of vice and stratagem was the only avenue the jade Fortune had left

open. Into this avenue he steadfastly walked, and fared as others have fared who have followed the same road.

As shall be plainly seen hereafter, I can conceive no demands made upon my duty or my love as a child, that I should seek to subdue the harsh outline of Mr. Boothby's memory, which is all that he bequeathed to me. My resolution to write the truth shall never suffer obstruction either from sentiment or shame; and as I have never permitted any passion, whether of love or hate, despair or hope, tenderness or contempt, to divert me from my resolution, so I shall take care that these pages are neither darkened nor brightened by any disclosures that will tend to represent me as either better or worse than nature hath made me.

Yet justice demands I should bear witness to Mr. Boothby's character, and affirm that but for the unnatural treatment of his father, who refused to extend him his hand when he was sinking, not knowing but that Vice was offering her dark support on the other side, Mr. Boothby might have become an honest, virtuous man, and an ornament to society; to the best of which he was

entitled even when he was most saddened by the fumes from the chalice of Vice; not less by the elegance of his manners, the charms of his conversation, and the dignity of his carriage, than by the ably-simulated sweetness of his sentiments, and by the finely-impersonated honesty of his motives.

Those who are acquainted with the life of Mr. Savage, son to the Earl Rivers by my Lady Macclesfield, who afterwards was married to Colonel Brett, might properly judge from that gentleman's career of the many uncommon hardships Mr. Boothby was obliged to endure. Good parts were never highly esteemed in Britain. A great man in this country is an egg which only death can hatch, or a seed that is to be buried before it will yield. Those who would know what poor rewards attend upon learning, may read Dr. Johnson's gravely satyrick poem called "The Young Author," or his elegant "Vanity of Human Wishes," and if they should doubt the word of one whom poverty had severely instructed, let them turn to Mr. Cibber's "Lives of the Poets," where they will find that the greatest parts and the most prodigious industry have often failed to

earn a man a dinner, or to procure a nobler burial than a pauper's shell.

One night in the year 1747, Mr. Boothby attended the play at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, on the occasion of the appearance there of an actress whose merits he had heard loudly discussed by certain critics and beaux at a tavern he frequented near to Bow Street. This actress was Mrs. Pritchard, of whose fame the world is now justly full, no performer to my taste ever having excelled her, whether in the sprightly and genteel parts of comedy, or in the higher reaches of pathetick tragedy. But though Mr. Boothby could not but be sensibly diverted by the fine airs, the lively graces, and the pert, sly humours of the excellent actress, the greater part of his attention was taken up by contemplating when she was present and meditating when she was withdrawn, the charms of a young female who acted a humble character, but with such skill as raised it to the level of the principal personages of the play.

If I had not seen her miniature, done by Mr. Spenser, the famous miniature-painter, I should have been silent as to her beauty ; but however I

might have distrusted Mr. Boothby's transports (for even as a husband he would continue to speak of his wife with the admiration of a lover ; whence it will be seen it is not always that possession cloyes, though indeed it is as well to take for a rule what is rather confirmed than shaken by exceptions), I am constrained to accept the decision of my judgment.

Paint upon your imagination a young and elegant female, moulded in a form of matchless symmetry. Her eyes, which were large, black and piercing, were surmounted by eyebrows full and regular, and arched with that perception of beauty with which Nature sometimes asserts her superiority over all other artists. Her face was embellished by a sweet profile, her nose being small, with the faint and dainty curve upwards which speaks to a love of mischief and mirth. Her hair, which was of a dark red, making the contrast of her black eyes singular and striking, grew in great profusion, and when loosened reached below her middle. Her neck, which was long and delicate, was white as the purest alabaster or ivory, and seemed to grow out of a yielding bed of soft and fragrant lilies. Her teeth were small, pure

and regular, and shone with a most ravishing effect when she smiled, from between the ripe and rosy portals of her lips.

Mr. Boothby had no sooner beheld her than he felt the soft transports of love flutter in his breast, and fill his soul with a delicious amazement. When the play was over he hastened to the door whence the players leave the theatre, in the hope of seeing her. There were several chairs in waiting, into one of which he, ere long, observed her step; though it was rather the rational and sagacious instinct of his love than the grosser faculty of sight, that enabled him to detect the nymph under the gray disguise of the habiliments she had donned in the room of the airy costume of the stage.

He followed the chair up the Haymarket, on through Leicester Fields, and so to St. Giles', where it presently stopped before a mean dwelling in Broad Street. Having noted the place of her residence, Mr. Boothby returned to his lodgings; and next day repairing to an ale-house near the Strand, he fell to making oblique inquiries among certain of the players concerning her; which being answered, gave him to know her name was Lavinia

Modeley ; that she was an orphan ; that she was gaining thirty-five shillings a week from the theatre ; and that she had been but three months before the town, having come from Ireland, with a letter to the manager from Mr. William Mynitt, an excellent actor in tragedy.

This being ascertained, he took Mr. Benson apart, who was then acting at the Haymarket, and calling for a dram, made him acquainted with his passion, and begged him to present him to the nymph for whom he burned. This Mr. Benson cheerfully consented to do, and bade him attend the theatre that night, and after the second act to step round, when he undertook to make the lover known to his charmer.

As it is not my intention to write Mr. Boothby's history, but my own, I need enter no further into the particulars of that meeting and of the events that grew out of it, than to say, that as Miss Modeley had at first sight inspired Mr. Boothby with a passion for her, so on his being presented to her, she found him the reverse of disagreeable; and as the protestations of a pretty fellow—for Mr. Boothby when young was strikingly handsome, of a sanguine complexion, which dissipation could

not cloud, a straight nose, white teeth, and well-turned limbs—fed her vanity with a lofty opinion of her merits, she, after a few meetings, proved herself not disinclined to become his wife.

Being unwilling that their marriage should be known (she being desirous as an actress to be regarded as single, which is an ambition most actresses have, as they are of opinion that the admiration of the laced hats for their persons may bring down that applause which their merits could not provoke), they concerted to procure their union at the hands of one of the Fleet parsons, a body of disreputable men who, in those days, drove a flourishing trade by consenting to marry persons without the formality of those inquiries which our Church imposes ; by which many creatures were legally united who would not have been suffered to enter into matrimony by the sterner theologues ; as witness the case of Mary Sumner, (of whom I have myself heard tell,) who having been deceived by her swain, she was unwilling her friends should know her shame, and so gave out she was married ; to carry out which beyond the dispute of proof, she caused a young female companion

to attire herself as a man, and taking her arm, presented herself before one Mr. Wyatt, who saw through the trick; but consenting to be blinded by a guinea for each eye, read the service, and delivered the certificate.

Mr. and Mrs. Boothby were married at the Salutation Tavern, near Great Andrew Church, on the 30th of September, in the year 1749; and on the first day of July, in the year 1750, was born Lætitia-Lavinia Boothby, the writer of these Memoirs, at Little Queen Street, where Mr. and Mrs. Boothby then lodged.



CHAPTER II.

*Of my early life and hardships; with an account
of a street-broil, and its consequences.*

AS these Memoirs do not properly begin until the year 1771, when I was in my twenty-first year, I know not whether I shall be affording the reader much diversion by entering into a particular account of my life to that period; therefore, having a story to tell of which it is not right the reader should be baulked by long prefaces and digressions, I will here briefly set down one or two particulars, and then proceed to my relation.

It hath ever been the lot of the most beautiful women to perish early, and such was my mother's fate, she dying when I was three years old. Though I was far from being so advanced as to do without her, yet I could not but congratulate myself afterwards, when I reflected that I had received her care through

that tender time of infancy which most demands a mother's solicitude; for I was well on my feet, and had got all my teeth, before she died, and had gone through most of the sicknesses that usually befall infants.

I was too young to recollect whether my father's grief was great; but I make no doubt he lamented her decease with such demonstrations of woe as might have sprung from deeper feelings than he could be sensible of. For my part, I should say he mourned rather the mistress than the wife; for though they had lived together four years, yet her beauty had made that time seem but as four months, and doubtless another four years might have passed ere he would have found himself growing weary of the same fare. This speaks eloquently to my mother's powers of pleasing; for no man was ever more sensible of the cloying effects of repetition than Mr. Boothby, who would often say "that a dish of ortolans served every day, would make a man heartily sick of ortolans in a week."

I was very staid as a little girl, and as I began, so I grew. I had a knack of disguising my

feelings even at that season of youth when the passions have no constraint put upon them; and could weep or laugh internally, without any sensible change discovering itself in my features. My mother's controul over Mr. Boothby had been beneficial while she lived; for the charms of her company took him away from the society of the alehouses and taverns; and though she was an actress, yet her virtue was incorruptible, whilst her sprightly airs and romping spirits lent such a modest fascination to her society, as Mr. Boothby could not contemplate without visibly improving his own manners and morals. He owed largely his support to her gains at the theatre; so that when she died he found his loss to be in more accounts than one.

The unexpected stroke of her death, which was occasioned by an inflammation of the lungs, put him upon the necessity of seeking his own living; and though no doubt, at the first setting off, the struggle between Hunger and Virtue was great, yet Hunger at last prevailed, and drove him once again to that vicious society from which his marriage had rescued him. We went into meaner lodgings in the same street,

and I would often have gone without a dinner but for the charity of the landlord, who having a little girl of my own years, was rendered sympathetick of my distress. Yet I took care never to complain; the calm gravity of my countenance never exposed the resentment against Mr. Boothby that sometimes lay burning at my heart.

The few guineas Mr. Boothby was from time to time possessed of were more often the fruits of gaming than of literature. His habit was to spend the evening at a gaming-house, where he would stake what money he had. If fortune was propitious, he would return to his lodgings, order a bottle from a neighbouring tavern, which he would empty and then to bed. But if luck was adverse, he would entice some young spark, new to the town, from the gaming-house to a tavern near to St. Paul's, where, pretending to congratulate him on his luck or to commiserate his loss, he would bawl for a pack of cards, and backed by some dissolute fellows who would share the plunder thus acquired, would fleece the victim of his last groat.

But it was not always he would meet with

a green hand ; and being cleared out, without the means of retrieving his luck, he would return half-crazy with passion, and discharge at me such a volley of oaths as would send me affrighted from the room. Then presently his rage would all on a sudden subside ; he would come to me in my little garret and shower upon me as many caresses as he had before stunned me with imprecations.

“Why wilt thou anger me with that stubborn face, wench ?” he would cry. “Hast no heart for thy father’s misfortunes ? Thou hast no look of thy mother in thy eyes ; and yet methinks I cannot but love thee as my Lavinia’s child. Come, buss me, and tell me thou dost not hate me.”

At this I would approach and put my lips to his cheeks ; but would not cast my arms about his neck, for I knew not but that he would burst out again with his fierce reproaches ; and at such a moment my pride would not have me caught in a posture of tenderness.

Sometimes he would bring friends home, when they had lingered so long at the gaming-house that on sallying forth they found the taverns closed.

One of these friends was Mr. Estcourt, a battered beau, who protested he was sprung from the same family with Mr. Richard Estcourt, the famous comedian. He had a foolish, pock-eaten face, but his black eyes were small and shrewd, and rolled about like the beads in a puppet's sockets when the strings are pulled. He was proud of his dress, which was commonly a black velvet coat, patched at the elbows, a taudry green and silver waistcoat, with dirty yellow velvet breeches; he would vow he had ruffles, but they were always at wash.

Another of Mr. Boothby's friends was Captain Sandford, a man over six feet high, whose coarse black worsted stockings and snuff-coloured coat helped to swell the gross outline of his vast person. He was as well known at Bath as he was at White's; boasted of intrigues of which he was innocent; professed an intimacy with people of quality whom he had never seen; had been more often in the Round-house for beating the watch, and provoking midnight broils, than any other gallant on town; was dreaded by authors as the fellow that commonly led the hisses which damned their plays; and bid fair to tread the

full circle of the Gatehouse, Newgate, the Old Bailey and Tyburn. He was the son of an old debauched gaming knight that ruined himself by play, and is said to have stript his father of his last shilling.

Though I was commonly in bed when Mr. Boothby returned with his friends, yet it would often be his humour to have me up that I might serve them, which I did by filling their glasses and helping them to lights for their pipes.

Once, when Mr. Boothby was at one of these carousals along with the two sparks I have described, the landlord came into the room, and stepping to the table, said sternly to Mr. Boothby, whilst he pointed to me who sat half asleep in a corner, "that if he had not respect for himself, he should have too much compassion on his child to keep her within hearing of such company."

"S'life!" cries Captain Sandford, "what frosty-pated prig is this come to harangue thee, Bob?"

"I come not to harangue, sir," answers the landlord civilly; "but I am a father, and know what it is to feel pity for the sufferings of little children."

"Faith!" cried Mr. Estcourt, "I dare to say you're too much a father to take it upon yourself to teach us morality." Then winking upon the others, "Z—ds, sir," says he, "have you never met a brat in rags going a-begging for a father?"

At this stroke there was a general laugh, which the landlord silenced by saying "that he did not doubt but Mr. Estcourt was a wit; but that he feared if he did not give his parts better usage, he would end by diverting the town with the spectacle of an hanging beau."

"Waunds!" cries the Captain. "D'ye mean to say, fellow, Mr. Estcourt will be hanged?"

"I say what I say," answered the landlord with dogged gravity; "and sir, if you have no taste for the truth spoken of your friend, you may take it yourself."

"Why, Dick, that's a challenge!" says Mr. Estcourt. At this Mr. Boothby laughed, but methought a little uneasily; and glanced at me in a hurried way; but I sat with an unconcerned face, though with a heart heavy as my eyelids.

"Why, you rascal," cries out the captain, pushing his chair from the table, "if I thought you meant what you say, by this hand I'd cut your

gizzard out and fry it over that candle for my supper."

"Why, then," says the landlord, coolly, pulling off his coat and baring his arms, "you had better lose no time."

The captain's face changed to the colour of his ruffles, which were stained and yellow; and tipping his wig off his forehead with his finger, he says with a would-be sneer, which was rather a grin of alarm :

"D'ye think, fellow, a gentleman would stoop to fight with you?"

"I don't know how that may be," says the other; "but if you're in haste for your supper you had better come and take it."

Then clenching his fist, he advanced a step, and stared full on the captain; but finding he made no reply, he took up his coat, and turning to Mr. Boothby who sat fondling his glass with a shaking hand, whispers—

"I think, Mr. Boothby, I had best take your girl from this company; for," says he, pointing over his shoulder to the two gentlemen who sat mute, "those creatures aren't society for one of her tender years." Then calling to me, "Come

along, poor little wretch," he cries; "tis well thy mammy isn't living to see thy condition."

To this Mr. Boothby said never a word. I stepped up to the landlord, who, taking my hand, conducted me to my chamber.

After this Mr. Boothby did not again bring me from my bed; and presently I began to notice that whilst his fits of tenderness towards me were often repeated, he, in his moods of rage, would treat me less brutally than heretofore. Sometimes he would take me to the play, and more particularly to Mr. Rich's pantomimes at Covent Garden theatre; but I liked best the performances at the theatre in Drury Lane; for though there never was and never will be so wonderful an harlequin as Mr. Rich (who was to my taste greatly superior to Mr. Woodward); and though never again will the stage witness so great a profusion of splendid shows as were then to be seen, yet I always liked better to have my passions moved, than my humour tickled; and though I was as much in love with Mr. Spranger Barry, particularly when he acted *Romeo*, as any lady of figure, yet I cannot but think Mr. Garrick his better, not only in the most tender and pathe-

tick strokes, but in a sublime conception of the characters he acted. To Mr. Garrick I had but one objection : that he spoke too much as though he was rather off the stage than on ; whereas you might always see both Mr. Barry and Mr. Quin delivered their parts as though they were acting them ; and impressed by their solemn slow delivery, where Mr. Garrick wearied by a tedious naturalness.

Though Mr. Boothby did not alter his life, yet, as I got older, I perceived in him a growing concern for my future. This tenderness I could not witness but with dismay, as I knew not the schemes he might wish me to enter upon, to free him of the embarrassment of having to support me. He would have been well-pleased to see me married, but among his friends knew not one whom he could recommend for a husband. His objection to them was always on the score of poverty, not for their licentiousness. Indeed his opinion was that the finest gentleman in the world was he that embodied the greatest number of vices, properly overlaid with a fine coating of polish and decorated with the graces of good-breeding. He would make me walk in the parks, and when he was flush of money would carry me

to Ranelagh, or to the masquerades at the opera-house, hoping that by mingling among persons of quality, some young fop of fashion would be taken by my person and offer me marriage. And indeed I was much followed and much looked after, and might, by the artifices of Mr. Boothby, easily have procured me an husband, had I occupied an handsome residence instead of small and squalid lodgings; but Mr. Boothby rightly judged that should any of the young sparks that took notice of me, get to know the meanness of our condition, they might change the proposals he desired into offers such as he would be bound to resent, and with which he would not have my ears offended.

The landlord possessing a harpsichord, of which he offered me the use, I was enabled to divert myself with musick; and having the notes taught me by his daughter, a comely, good-natured wench, I speedily mastered the art, besides acquiring a light hand for the keys; and though I could never conquer some of the fugues of Mr. Bach of Berlin, nor the difficult sonatas of Scarlatti; yet could I easily perform the lighter melodies of Geminiani, Corelli, Tartini, and the ravishing Sacchini.

During my constant leisure, I likewise read much in books, and took care to be diligent in my application after knowledge; for I was very sensible that my condition in life was such as only my parts could improve; and as I knew not but that my future might be superior to my past, I was resolved to fit myself for it by education; which resolution, in time, breeding in me an appetite for study, made that which had appeared at first laborious and dry, very sweet and profitable.

It hath been observed by many wise men, that every great event in life, if properly examined into, will be found to have been occasioned by some trifling circumstance. The prosperity of nations may be traced by remarking the slow development of ideas which, in their first birth, might seem below the notice of wisdom. As it is with nations, so is it with individuals: we grow wise by accident and prosperous by chance; and most often, the insignificant occasion at which we sneer, proves the instrument by which our good is procured.

When I was in my twenty-first year, there befell Mr. Boothby an accident of which I am to

give a particular account; for though I was not there to see, yet did he relate the circumstance to me with such minuteness, that I am enabled to repeat it with as great faithfulness as though I had been an actor in the scene.

One night, on his leaving a coffee-house, much disordered in his spirits by losses he had sustained at cards, and darting many imprecations at fortune for the scurvy trick she had played him, his ear was invaded by a sudden great outcry in a neighbouring street, mingled with the clash of steel and the cries of exasperated men. Being a man of spirit, and though insensible to the whispers of virtue, never so to the entreaties of distress, he drew his hanger, and hastening round the corner, espied by the united light of the moon and a street lamp, three men who were heavily pressing with their swords upon a fourth that stood at bay, with his back to the wall, whilst he vigorously parried their strokes with his cane.

Mr. Boothby, not reflecting on the superiority of three men over two, but fired by the spectacle of this unequal combat, ran hastily forward, and with the flat of his sword, dealt one of them such a blow on his laced hat as tumbled him into the

gutter, where he lay without sound or movement. Then charging upon the others, he darted his sword into the thigh of a second, who, at the wound, uttered a terrible bellow, and casting away his weapon, turned and limped fleetly off, followed by the third.

The three ruffians being routed, Mr. Boothby, addressing himself to the gentleman against the wall, whom, by his clothes, he recognised as a person of condition, begged to know if he was hurt.

"Yes," says he; "they have pinked me in my left shoulder, which depriv'd me of the use of one hand, or I doubt they would have found so easy a victim."

Saying this, he attempted to remove his coat; but the pain being exquisite, he uttered a hollow groan, and leaning on the arm of Mr. Boothby, begged that he would carry him to a tavern, where he might get his wound dressed.

On reaching a coffee-house with which Mr. Boothby was acquainted (indeed, there were few houses in London where his face was not familiar), he led the gentleman to the parlour, and calling for some brandy, gave him a dram,

which speedily brought him to; then tenderly removing his coat, he laid open the shirt and exposed the wound, which he found not dangerous, being in the fleshy part, though much blood had been evacuated. Mr. Boothby then pulling out his handkerchief, tore it into slips, with which he bandaged up the wound; and perceiving the gentleman was revived, was for leaving him to call a coach, when he was arrested by a movement of the gentleman's hand.

"Sir," he said, "I am eternally obliged to you for the great service you have done me." And casting his eyes on Mr. Boothby's coat, which was worn and faded, he adds, "If it is in my power, sir, to be of any use to you, I beg you will oblige me by naming the way in which I can discharge the heavy debt you have laid me under."

"Sir," answered Mr. Boothby, than whom no one could better assume the lofty air and elegant manners of the fine gentleman, which the soiled look of his clothes rather increased than diminished, "I am rewarded by being made the instrument of rescuing so polished a gentleman from a situation of danger."

Saying which, he made a low bow, and was again for going, when the gentleman entreated him to sit and bear him company until he should feel able to endure the shaking of a coach.

It was never Mr. Boothby's custom to excuse himself to a company where he could drink free of the reckoning. So mixing himself a glass of gin, he drew an armchair from a corner, and calling for a pipe of Virginia, began to smoke. The gentleman ey'd him awhile in silence, and then propping himself up on one elbow, addressed him as follows.

"My name, sir, is John Bracebridge, and I would be glad to know the name of my protector." Being told, he proceeded: "You are to know I was a stranger to the three fellows that attacked me. They forced the quarrel upon me; for one of them hustled me as I passed, and then swaggering up, with his hat fiercely cocked, he cried, setting his hands on his hips, 'Damme, fellow, d'ye think it's the place of a gentleman to give the wall?' My blood was up, but I bade him in a cold voice to step out of my way. On which, he called to the others and ask'd them if they were used to the sport of pinking laced-cockchafers? Hearing

this, I begged him to acquaint me if he and his companions were footpads; for I was without a sword, and as they were three to one, I bade them know they might have my watch without being at the pains of bandying further civilities. Thinking by this I design'd an insult, when, in truth, I only spoke what was my conviction, they drew their swords, and one of them struck me over the head; on which, backing against a wall, I lay about me with my cane, bawling murder. And faith, sir, had you not come up just then, the law had lost one of its most promising limbs." Here he uttered a laugh.

"Then, sir," says Mr. Boothby, "I am to presume you are a lawyer."

"I am, sir," answers the other; "though a mighty poor one, egad! I am the son of that Sir Charles Bracebridge whose name was for a time the talk of the town, as being the author of a sprightly squib defending the conduct of Admiral Byng."

"I remember, sir," cried Mr. Boothby; "the name was, 'A Brave Story; or, Britain the Queen of the World.'"

"Right," says Mr. Bracebridge. "Well, sir,

my father's income being narrow, though the first baronet was the richest man of his county, he resolved to breed me to the law, that by getting to know as much as the lawyers who have brought the Bracebridge estates to their present condition, I might one day disentangle his affairs, and make us richer by some thousands a year. So, sir, the law is my profession. I have chambers in the Temple; but my studies have not profited me much yet; for I have but the allowance made me by my father to depend on, though a fortune is within my reach if I would but abate my pride to take it."

"Pride, sir," answered Mr. Boothby, "is but a sorry hack to ride on in this world. If we wish to leap the lofty barriers with which our road is everywhere encumbered, we have no choice but to search the devil's stables for one of the numerous steeds there stalled. And, methinks, Unscrupulosity is the mare that has the fleetest pace and the longest wind."

"Why," says Mr. Bracebridge, "as to that, you are to consider it is not always the quickest trotter that is the surest winner."

Mr. Boothby answered, that if he had fortune

to reach, he would take care to have a better horse than pride to carry him to it.

"But what, sir," says the other, "if that fortune be a mistress?"

Mr. Boothby made a wry face, at which Mr. Bracebridge laughed. "To be plain," he continued, "my fortune is a young lady who will have ten thousand pounds on the day of her marriage."

"And is your pride, sir, so great as to hinder you from marrying her?" cried Mr. Boothby, taking his pipe from his mouth, and fixing a look of amazement on his companion.

"Why to be candid, sir, it is," answered Mr. Bracebridge. "By your air, I plainly perceive you are no stranger to polite life; you will therefore judge that mine is not a modish passion."

"I know not if it be a modish passion to be willing to marry a woman with ten thousand pounds," said Mr. Boothby; "but if it is the mode, I protest there is more good sense and philosophy in fashion than mankind is willing to think."

"Why," cries out the other, "sure you would not have me be dependent on my wife for a living?"

“Why not, sir,” answered Mr. Boothby. “Does not a woman’s fortune when she marries become her husband’s? and being her husband’s, is not the table turned so that it is the wife who becomes dependent? Methinks it is as fair for a man to acquire money by marriage as by any other pursuit. He generally has to work very hard for what he gets; and I know some beaux of my acquaintance who would rather dig for a shilling a day, than earn five hundred pounds an year by undergoing the toil, the pains, and the penalties of courtship.”

“I grant that your argument is ingenious,” said Mr. Bracebridge; “but for my part I rate independence too highly to pawn it for thrice ten thousand pounds. Should my wife and I quarrel after we were married (and we should hardly merit the badge of matrimony did we not conform to one of the chief conditions under which it is conferred), d’ye think, sir, I could endure to be taunted by her with my poverty and her bounty? And should she not taunt me, her father might. And was her father to die, methinks there would not be wanting relatives and friends to keep me in mind of my obligations to her. And z——ds! should none of them mention the subject, my

sensitiveness would fill their faces and their speech with implications. I would not be so galled, sir."

"You view the matter through a dark glass," says Mr. Boothby with a smile.

"Nay, lookce, Mr. Boothby, I would not be thought a cynick; but is there ever a wife who does not make it the business of her life to spite her husband in some one thing? If you are jealous, she will take care to have a gallant. If you are frugal, she will have her box at the opera, and sit sixteen hours in the twenty-four at the card-table. If you are fond of your ease she will gall you with a thousand petty worries. If you are a student, she will give you no leisure for meditation; and if you are fond of company she will never be in the humour to entertain your friends."

"If this be your view of wedded life," said Mr. Boothby, "why do you not take the oath of coelibacy?"

"'Tis too late. I am betrothed."

"Then, sir," cries Mr. Boothby, "summon all your fortitude, and make up your mind to enjoy what you cannot help."

After this there was a pause, whilst Mr. Boothby

mixed himself another glass. Mr. Bracebridge sank back on the sofa with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Presently looking around, he says languidly,—

“Sure a woman is ever at the bottom of all mischief; ’twas Eve tempted Adam; and as long as the world hath its forbidden fruit, so long will the daughters of the one bring confusion on the sons of the other. See here this wound: ’twas a woman’s wish put me upon an undertaking that had like to have cost me my life.” Then seeing Mr. Boothby look inquiringly, he continued; “You are to know, sir, that the young lady I am betrothed to is blind. She has lately lost her confidante, and commissioned me to replace her. This morning, I heard from an aunt that there was a young female living over against St. Ann’s Street, of good-breeding and accomplishments, who would be likely to suit Miss Aston. So this evening, I resolved to call at her house; but on inquiring, found she was gone to the country. On coming away, I looked into the Sportsman, where, meeting a friend, we sat over a bottle; and after I left him I was set upon. Now, sir, it is plain that but for Miss Aston I had not received

this wound: for I would have had no call to search that neighbourhood. So, sir, the true logic of this wound, as of all the other ills of life, is, a woman's hand dealt it. Does not my logic draw a terrible inference from my betrothal? What a prognostick for my future!"

He said this with a smile; but Mr. Boothby's face was very grave; his eyes were fixt on Mr. Bracebridge's countenance, and it was plain he was deeply ruminating some thought that had suddenly struck him. Lighting his pipe with a steady hand, he sat smoking for some moments lost in contemplation; after which he thus address'd himself to Mr. Bracebridge:

"Sir, when by a happy accident fate placed it in my way to rescue you from the swords of the ruffians who designed to murder you, your gratitude for that which could justly claim no return occasioned you to offer some recompense for my service. Sir, what I am about to ask, will not, I think, be beyond your power to confer. I have a daughter, of whom my modesty forbids me to speak, except to say that she is young, of sprightly spirits, of genteel behaviour, and of solid parts. She has been motherless from the age of three.

She is now twenty years old ; and during that time my grief has been to think that should I die (which is equally the fate of rich and poor), she will be cast on the world without a friend to whom she may look for protection. Sir, you was just now speaking of a young female whom you designed to visit, that you might procure her services for your mistress. I make bold to say, that my daughter would be so well adapted for the situation you have in your mind, that you might search the town through for her better. And, sir, if you would be pleased to recommend her to your mistress (which on my conscience as a gentleman you may safely do), that she may make trial of her duties and provoke judgment of her capability, you would not only discharge in full the debt you was pleased to say I had laid you under, but you would make me eternally your obliged humble slave."

This spoken with an air of great gravity, and with a countenance well in keeping with that fatherly solicitude for me which he hinted rather than expressed, (judging by this means its effect would be more impressive), appeared to take Mr. Bracebridge mightily ; for stretching out his hand

he clasped that of Mr. Boothby, while he swore that as nothing gave him greater pleasure than to serve a man of breeding to whom he was vastly obliged, so not only should he take care to recommend Miss Boothby, but protested on his word as a man of nice honour, that she alone should fill the situation, which she would find was not beneath the notice of even a lady of quality.





CHAPTER III.

Concerning Miss Boothby's introduction to Miss Aston, with a description of Dr. Aston's house in Wimpole Street.

IT had been arranged between Mr. Bracebridge and Mr. Boothby that they should meet next day at a coffee-house at the corner of Spring Garden. Thither Mr. Boothby repaired at the appointed hour, and found Mr. Bracebridge dawdling over a dish of chocolate, his left hand in a sling, and with him a gentleman dressed in a bag wig, laced ruffles, a coat of paduasoy, and black solitaire. On Mr. Boothby's entrance, Mr. Bracebridge ran forward to embrace him, and presenting him to his companion, "This, sir," says he, "is the gentleman who saved my life last night. His name is Mr. Boothby. Mr. Boothby this is Dr. Aston." Dr. Aston, rising, made a low bow to Mr. Boothby, and tapping a fine enamel'd snuff-box, exclaimed "That after

Mr. Bracebridge he knew no one who would feel more sensible of Mr. Boothby's brave behaviour than himself: though," says he, with a knowing smile at Mr. Bracebridge, "I know not whether Dolly would thank me for putting myself before her in my gratitude."

Mr. Bracebridge then calling the drawer, bade him bring a cup of burnt wine, which being placed before Mr. Boothby, the business of the meeting was opened by Mr. Bracebridge.

"I made you a promise last night, sir, that I would procure the appointment of your daughter to the post of companion to Miss Aston; and that I might not be balked in my wish to serve you, made shift this morning to be out of bed betimes, and calling on Miss Aston made her acquainted with the debt of gratitude I had incurred, and begged her to aid me in the discharge of it. This she very cheerfully consented to do, by giving me full authority to engage the services of Miss Boothby. Dr. Aston then coming in, we fell to talking the matter fully over, which ended in Dr. Aston begging me to make him acquainted with the preserver of my life."

At this Dr. Aston made Mr. Boothby another

low bow, which Mr. Boothby with great solemnity and elegance of manner returned.

"It will be giving Miss Aston and myself," says Dr. Aston, "the greatest happiness, if by carrying out your desires with respect to your daughter, we sufficiently prove ourselves sensible of the obligation you have conferred upon us both by saving Mr. Bracebridge's life. For by doing so, I cannot but say you have been instrumental in prolonging the happiness of Miss Aston, which would have been cut short, together probably with her life, had Mr. Bracebridge fallen by the swords of his assailants."

"I beg, sir," says Mr. Boothby, "you will not rate my service too highly. I did but act as every man of spirit would have acted on a like occasion. And sir, I would add that by receiving my daughter into your house, you lift from my heart a load that hath long weighed down upon it; for I may rest sure she will meet with consideration at your hands, since gratitude always takes its growth from tenderness; and however unworthy I may be of your thanks, 'tis enough for me to receive them to know that I am honoured by the applause of a good and worthy man."

To this Dr. Aston replied by a bow, and by extending his snuff-box to Mr. Boothby; for as it was a custom among the ancients to sacrifice a beast at the commencement of their friendship, so on the same occasion, it appears the custom among the moderns to offer up a tributary pinch of snuff.

Mr. Boothby had related to me the circumstance of his meeting with Mr. Bracebridge on the preceding night; and though I could not dissemble the sudden emotion of joy that disordered my spirits at the news, yet I took care to discipline my mind to view the matter as though it was to be barren of issue. For I was never willing to repose faith in the promises of fine gentlemen, who by mere word of mouth do nearly always think themselves quits with those that have obliged them; not considering that a promise is merely the shadow of action thrown in advance, and is empty of satisfaction unless closely pressed on by fulfilment.

But when Mr. Boothby, after leaving the gentlemen in Spring Garden, returned to tell me that my engagement was accomplished, and that I was to call to pay my duties to Miss Aston

and receive her commands that afternoon at four o'clock, I for a time could not believe that such good news was true; and turned away from Mr. Boothby, and went to the window, and gazed upon the pallid sky, with my mind filled with the pleasing melancholy that good news breeds more often than joy. But Mr. Boothby was too well pleased with the issue of his adventure to heed my countenance; and though he had but half a guinea in his pocket, dispatched the maid for a bottle, vowing that though Fortune was often unkind, yet was she the most constant (with all her fickleness) of mistresses; and that the jade should be heartily toasted for the sudden smile she had been pleased to brighten his life with.

Indeed he was very well satisfied to be rid of me so cheaply to himself; for of this adventure the springs were neither vice nor cunning; 'twas but a just acknowledgment of services which, though he had protested they were small, he rated in his own mind very highly; and, as I afterwards discovered, he even thought the recompense beneath the obligation, and considered that a sum of money should have been tenderly

sent him, for which behaviour Mr. Bracebridge might readily have found an excuse in his coarse stockings and frouzy toupet.

It being twenty minutes after three, I took care to decently apparel myself in a black silk sacque, ruffles, and black gloves, which had been my mother's, and sallied forth, taking the direction of Wimpole Street, where Dr. Aston had his residence. On arriving at the house I knocked with a steady hand; I was not conscious of any dismay; nor was there need to recollect my energies. Nature had gifted me with a face which could look as dumbly as any countenance of marble; I had a steady mouth, and a prodigious controul over my eyes, having often for my diversion studied parts before the pier-glass; wherein I discovered that no actress could excel me in communicating fire or languor, pathos or joy, melancholy or gratitude to my gaze, without any corresponding emotion diverting my mind from the schemes it might be rehearsing.

I was admitted by a footman in an handsome livery, and conducted to a lofty chamber, where he left me whilst he went to acquaint Miss Aston with my presence. I gazed about me, not a little

oppressed by the magnificence of the room, with a disposition to feel mortified by the insignificance into which it had served to shrink me. It was the library, as I afterwards knew, though I needed not the telling, since I could judge it was by the long shelves disposed against the walls, and heavily furnished with books. There were many pictures hung upon those parts of the walls which were naked of the embellishment of the bookshelves; and about the room were disposed certain tables of marble and stone, to one of which I could not chuse but draw nigh and inspect. 'Twas a beautiful white marble table, near five feet long, and almost a quarter of a foot thick; upon it reposed the sculpture of a dying gladiator, partly sitting, partly resting on his right hand. It was a copy, as I afterwards heard, from a celebrated piece at Rome, and sure art has achieved no higher triumph than the mournful air of the countenance, in which approaching dissolution is plainly visible. I likewise noticed a lapis lazuli table, on which was a very fine urn, with birds, flowers, and foliages around it. An handsome busto of Pindar stood over the door, and in a recess,

partly draped by crimson curtains, there shone a ravishing statue of Cleopatra. But methought after the figure of the gladiator, the pictures were the most exquisite objects contained within the room. I should have thought there never could have been so ravishing a painting as that of the Three Nymphs Bathing, with Actæon looking on, had there not been next it, done to the very life, a portrait of an old man selling sweetmeats to children, all the figures a laughing.

Here could I have remained all day, never fatigued with admiring the thousand beauties which my inspection was calling out; for besides the pictures, the tables, the relievos, carvings, and bustos, there stood in a corner a square ebony case covered with glass, wherein were deposited countless coins and medals—Grecian, Dorick, Roman, Hebrew, Punick, and Arabick, in gold, silver, and brass; with Hetruscan coins and medals of the Byzantine princes; with pennies of Saxon kings, groats from Edward III., shillings from Henry VII., and milled crowns of Queen Elizabeth. To know the history of these things, methought, was to know the history of the world; and my understanding, which had

before been not a little arrogant in the delusion of its knowledge, shrunk before this well-stored magazine of learning, like a school-brat before the haughty wig and pompous strut of the tyrannick pedagogue.

There came presently the footman that had admitted me, and desired I would follow him.

I mounted the stairs, and was led to a spacious handsome apartment ranged around with sconces and mirrours, and where I trod upon a Persian carpet that yielded no murmur to the pressure of my feet. There sat in a high-back chair of velvet near to the window, an antique dame, a little withered ancient woman, quite dried up, and curled like a November leaf, with an underlip that made a perpetual language, from which the vacant air of the countenance took away all meaning.

Near to her on a couch of blue satin, reposed the form of a young female, with one hand holding an embroidered handkerchief drooping languidly from the side. She raised her head when the footman approached, and seemed to listen; and on his whispering, sat erect, and desired him to place a chair for me. Then

turning her face, which I could now see was sightless, she stretched out her hand, which I took with a trembling deference, that might have seemed to her like tenderness, and raised it to my lips. At this she smiled, methought with a great sweetness; and then the abrupt expression, which was like a lustre shining on a marble countenance, faded out, and her countenance took the air of repose, as of one who sleeps. (This is an air, I think, may often be observed in the blind; and such repose cannot but come from the absence of that self-consciousness which is bred in people who have their sight, by their conceiving that all those who regard them think of them (which is not so); whereas the blind see not the regard of others, and, like those that sleep, take no concern of the thoughts and speculations of the company they are in, whence comes their placid, pensive air.)

"Though I cannot see you, Miss Boothby," says she, in a clear, calm voice, "yet I doubt not but I shall love you as well as though your image was painted on my eyes; for you have a noble brave man for a father, and where the soil is good, the growth is always rich."

"You will like her," says the old lady, who had returned my curtsey with a well-bred, old-fashioned bend of the head; "for her eyes are clear and sparkling, she hath a pale and steady face, and her dress has no taste of extravagance, but is modest, sad, and decent."

I thought to trace a smile on Miss Aston's face at this; but all was still and slumberous. 'Twas plain she was used to seeing out of other people's eyes; though sure the old grannam's garrulity would sometimes offend the fastidious ear of breeding.

"'Tis my grandmother, Lady Ringwood," said Miss Aston, that I might know who it was addressed me. Her mother's mother, then, thought I; which I should have presently guessed, for in a family it is always the wife's relations that claim the greatest privileges.

"When I was a girl," says my lady, "we were more quick to take judgment of our acquaintances by their dress, than now. Then 'twas all plainness; now 'tis all flummery. Then 'twas the natural hair that God the Father gave to grow upon the head; now 'tis a mounseer's mixture of wool, horsehair, hemp, lard, and meal, garnished

with diamond skewers, and decorated with kitchen fruits. Then 'twas the decent apron, cap, and kerchief; now 'tis catgut and gauzes, tippets and flimsy stomachers, Paris nets and fringes, blonds and velvet-patches. Honesty now peeps through a calash as well as roguery; and virtue hires the same mantua-makers and lacemen that equip vice."

It was plain by the air of deference with which Miss Aston listened to this discourse (which methought was delivered with all the firmness of stupidity accustomed to be flattered), that my Lady Ringwood was mistress over Dr. Aston's house; so, with a bow, I gave her to know that my notions were in full agreement with hers; though in my heart I thought her a foolish old putt, for inveighing against the present taste, than which to my mind nothing was ever more modish and polite.

Pausing some moments to remark if my lady designed to continue her speech, Miss Aston presently says,

"I would have you to know, Miss Boothby, that your duties here will not be very arduous. I am in love with reading; but the merciful God"

(here my Lady Ringwood bowed her head, which gesture I was fain to imitate) "has withheld from me the use of my sight, and I am constrained to employ that of another. I doubt not but our tastes will agree, so that you shall not be wearied by reading what you will not find your pleasure. 'Tis for your society I ask you to bear me company in this house; for indeed, the darkness I ever occupy leaves me very lonely; and when I am saddened by this solitude, it is soothing to listen to the sounds of another's voice."

"I shall take care, madam," I replied, "to make your pleasures mine, which I have not the vanity to believe I shall find similar; though I shall trust so to esteem your judgment as presently to approach it."

Here methought my Lady Ringwood looked on me with an air of magnanimity, that not a little flattered my hope of planting well my first step into this life; and I was impelled by a great solicitude more particularly to please my lady; for I properly judged, after I should be gone, both Dr. and Miss Aston would take my lady's opinion on the new dependant. To achieve her good opinion, I believed flattery would prove the most

profitable instrument ; for there is no old woman beyond the reach of this art. Nay, it would rather appear that the older one gets in a knowledge of knavery, the more one likes to be duped by it ; witness the language of my Lord Dragon, whose experience of life was great and various, and who protested there was no woman more easy to procure in marriage than a widow whose husband had maltreated her. Of old women 'tis certainly true, there is not one of them but could copiously discourse on the hollowness of flattery : yet is there not one of them but could be more readily taken by a compliment than the little miss whom her experience is designed to instruct. I resolved, however, to forbear awhile from drawing on the armoury of my cunning, for it is wiser to hold the shaft than to dart it at random ; and to speak to the first impulse of the imagination is sometimes to discover more than is good for your scheme.

After some further conversation, I rose to take my leave, secretly satisfied that the field I was now to enter upon would not prove barren. Miss Aston pleased me vastly ; I could readily perceive that she was blessed with an uncommon sweetness of temper, which some would ascribe to her reso-

lution to endure the great calamity of her blindness with fortitude; but which I would rather impute to her being ignorant of that knowledge of life of which the eye better makes the mind a master than the ear.

It was agreed that on that day-week I should commence my duties; but as I was about to make my congee, Miss Aston called me to her, and whispered, "that as I, no doubt, would be put to some expense in my preparations, 'twas right she should help me to meet the charges, since they would be occasioned by her need of my company." Saying which she slipped ten guineas, rolled in paper, into my hand, pressing my fingers upon the parcel with a pleasing, cordial grasp. Thus tendered, I could not refuse the gift, for which I thanked her with a low trembling voice, which, I flattered myself, was properly attuned to the note of gratitude. Afterwards I reflected that she must have premeditated this gift, since it was rolled in paper, and lay ready in her pocket; which I could not deny manifested uncommon thoughtfulness.

I repeated to Mr. Boothby all the particulars of this interview, together with the conversation I

have not set down. But I was cautious to keep my counsel as to the ten guineas ; for I judged that should he get to know of them, he would not have scrupled to demand them. 'Twas possible he would have claimed them as part payment of the disbursements he had been at in rearing me ; or if this argument had not occurred, he would have plaintively referred me to his poverty ; or have forcibly ravished the money from me ; or have entreated it as a loan that he might multiply it by a stake at the gaming-house. But indeed I wanted it more badly than he, though he should have come to me dinnerless to demand it ; for was I not entering among people of figure, where it was possible I might encounter some pretty young fellow of merit, to whom my parts and face should recommend me ? And for the triumphs I meditated, I needed all the external support of dress, which, God help me ! I knew would be but poorly supplied by Miss Aston's gift.





CHAPTER IV.

*Of my installation ; with a conversation, in which
will be found some hints concerning the tastes
of our age.*

'TWAS clear Dr. Aston was not only a man of understanding and knowledge, but that he was favoured with an extensive fortune; since each examination of his house served but to discover many new objects of greater or less uncommon value, which spoke as well to his parts and taste as to the length of his purse. 'Twas to be lamented Miss Aston had not her eyesight, by the deprivation of which she lost much solid entertainment from her father's collections. Wherever room could be found without pressing too close on the convenience of space, there might be seen some statue, column, group or busto, saved from the wreck, or ingeniously imitated from the memorials, of an ancient city, and purchased at a great cost to the possessor.

I had a moderate sized but richly furnished bedroom allotted me, where might be seen some of the less valuable but always remarkable specimens of Dr. Aston's collections. Thus, on the mantelpiece stood two elegant pieces representing Bacchus clad with an entire skin, and Saturn with a child. To the wall over the chimney a costly mirror was affixed, in which the richness of the glass gave a pearl-like and rosy tint to the reflections; so that vanity would never weary of the charming portrait that the mirror presented. There were likewise some large paintings; one a Friar and Nun, near as large as life, so that my fancy when warm, would sometimes make the friar's face to live, and impart to his small and stained eyes, in which no lustre of the light from heaven might be found, a sinister malevolent look, as though the figure, to appease the devilish longings its countenance confest, must perforce step from its dark perspective. But more comfortable was the portrait of a gallant of the last reign; painted, methought, with a cunning hand; for the large tie-wig was done as though it might be shifted to the head of the spectator, while the dry and parched lips, and the red eyes, bred a desire of thirst in a

beholder out of the necessity they discovered for some cool drink.

Miss Aston welcomed me with great elegance of manner when I was come, which more plainly intimated to me the respectability of her pedigree, than the most elaborate atchievement could have done, or twenty volumes on that subject, though writ by Mr. Warburton, the famous Somerset herald ; for her behaviour, which was adorned with the modish graces of breeding, was plainly an instinct which only ancient blood could have transfused ; for how was she, that had no eyes, to borrow those decorations of deportment which might appear among her friends ?

She took my hand and kissed me on my left cheek, and greeted me as though I was a sister, which made me to feel very much at my ease, for her condescension struck at once at my rebellious pride, and left it powerless to prompt. Lady Ringwood was abroad, taking the air in the park when I arrived, which gave me leisure to talk without interruption to Miss Aston, with whose conversation I cannot deny but I was vastly impressed ; for she was far my better in reading and my superior in understanding ; though her

delicacy, her ready wit at discovering the subjects I was best able to discuss, her attention to what I spoke, and her concern that I should think myself her match, left me free of all uneasiness, and qualified me to ramble on, as though I was in the presence of a sister rather than a patron.

I'll not deny but she might have found me as agreeable as I her; for being always avaricious of knowledge, which I knew to be a greater power than wealth when properly applied, I was never above receiving information from the meanest; and here was one whose discourse was the most profitable oratory I had ever listened to. The house being full of texts, but one had to be mentioned by me for her to discourse under; as, for example, when I mentioned to her an handsome Greek statue of a river, represented by a *Naiad* sleeping on a bank, she acquainted me that the statue represented the *Nile*; that the bird holding a lizard by the tail, the lizard going away, the snail near to it, and the bird like a duck with a serpent in its mouth, were symbols having a particular relation to *Egypt*, and which could not apply to any other country; and entered upon an account of the duck, which, she said, was the *Ibis*

of the ancient Egyptians, because this bird eats and destroys serpents, and is likewise found in the urns contained in the sepulchres.

Such knowledge, methought, manifested an uncommon memory; since there were few of the statues, columns, relievos, pictures, and bustos about the house, of which she could not, as I afterwards came to know, give me a particular information; whence it is plain she must have been instructed in them by her papa, and that her memory had retained, not only the particulars that had been imparted, but the shapes, sizes, and structures of the objects on which he had discoursed to her.

It was from this conversation I learned Dr. Aston was a physician, having an extensive practice, which drew him much from home; and that he was intimately known to many of the greatest wits and politicians of the age; and that his delight was to give dinners at which he would assemble such celebrated characters as Mr. Wilkes, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Foote, Mr. Selwyn, Mr. Burke, Mr. Fox, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Carter, and many others, some of whom will not be so well known to the next age as they are

to this. He did not entertain his friends with routs and assemblies, because Miss Aston's infirmity deprived her of the power of mingling in such diversions; but she took great delight in dinner-parties where distinguished characters were the guests; and as her papa studied her tastes in everything, so he made this form of entertainment his peculiar care; and she assured me no man in London gave dinners, unless it was Sir Joshua Reynolds, which were more heartily relished by the company than Dr. Aston's.

She then branched into the subject of her betrothal, which, methought, she approached with needless delicacy; but the private particulars of which she very plainly was resolved to impart, that my post of *confidante* might be securely established *de haute lutte*. 'Twas strange that whilst she spoke, there should have risen in me a sense of my superiority over her; but when I carefully dissected the triumphant ray through the prism of my judgment, I discovered that it was due to the helplessness of her blindness, which rendered me capable, whilst she talked, to narrowly watch her countenance, whilst she could have no idea of the steadfast gaze I fixed on her. I did not

much relish this discovery in myself of liking to be in company with one whom I could master ; I doubted but this feeling would presently breed a conceit that would impair my chances with others who might have keen eyes and a proper stomach to digest their report. I knew that it is fatal to one's schemes to rate one's strength above its capacity ; for he that would battle victoriously with the world, should first apprise himself of the exact extent of his powers, and neither diminish nor exaggerate the estimate by the fraction of an atom. This is rendered impossible where there is conceit.

But to proceed to my relation of her betrothal : she informed me that her papa was eager to procure her union with Mr. Bracebridge, but that it was Mr. Bracebridge's whim not to marry until he could command such a fortune as would enable him to meet her on equal ground.

" I suppose he wishes to enjoy the gaieties of the town," she says, with a melancholy smile, " before settling into the regular and dull life of a husband. Yet I cannot but respect his objections ; for if I was a man I could ill endure being burthened with the conscience of owing my subsistence to a woman."

"Would not his father," replied I, "give him such an income as would leave him free to spend or reject your fortune as his pride might direct?"

"Alas!" she cried, "Sir Charles Bracebridge hath barely enough to serve for his own expenses, and he finds it galling to his narrow revenue to impart even that small sum which is all my Jackey hath now to depend on."

"But sure Mr. Bracebridge will one day draw profit from his profession?" said I.

"'Tis a day a long while off," she answered, with a gentle smile. "But, indeed, while I have his love I have no right to ask for more; though my great happiness is in his society; and there is no voice falls so gently and reassuring as his when my spirits are opprest by their eternal darkness. I could willingly sit all day long with my hand in his, and ask no greater bliss than to listen to his voice."

I could not repress a smile at such simple taste, though there was no need to disguise it, since she could not see. 'Twas no doubt her blindness pinned her down to this simple creed of happiness; but it was not in me to feel sympathy with so narrow a view of pleasure, when the proper

survey embraced so great an array of cards, ridottos, auctions, masquerades, visits, assemblies, seasons at Bath or Tunbridge, the courtship of gallants, the devoted passion of a pretty fellow of parts, and all the thousand diversions which may occupy the time of a sprightly lady of condition, which, methought, I could not but make was I to marry a man of quality.

After the pause, during which I had made the above reflections, Miss Aston proceeded thus :

“My papa, Miss Boothby, has a notion that my helplessness, which is occasioned by my blindness, demands a protector whose character should place his fidelity and care beyond the dispute of present doubt. And in Mr. Bracebridge he believes he has found such a man. My Lady Ringwood hath given my Jackey much encouragement ; for in her the sagacity of old age hath enabled her to detect many stirring qualities, and she has repeated to Dr. Aston that she makes no doubt but Mr. Bracebridge would prove me an excellent husband. But, my dear, I need no other assurance of this than my own heart ; for 'tis only I can tell the depth of his tenderness. Sure,” she cries, “God has given him a spirit as

sweet and comely as his person, which, I am told, is greatly distinguished. Would you know how I have painted him? Alas! I would not care to open my eyes, lest his image should disappoint me. For love is a flattering rogue, and takes his colours rather from the wishes of the heart than from the shape and complexion of his study, and has made of my heart a locket which I may open when I will, and witness there the loveliest miniature that passion ever painted."

"Madam," I answered, "I doubt whether your portrait be more flattering than the truth; for though I am a stranger to Mr. Bracebridge's person, though not to his goodness, yet Mr. Boothby has made him familiar to me by representing him as a stately, handsome gentleman, with a smile like a sudden piece of good news, regular white teeth, and blue eyes that seem to caress the object they rest on."

At this she gave me a smile as though thanking me for the good opinion I had expressed of her lover; and now I could see where her weakness lay, and was resolved to profit by the discovery. 'Twas plain she had not that madness of love in her which finds cause for jealousy in shadows and

in air, or she would not have been well pleased to hear her lover's praises sounded by a woman.

"If I had a daughter," she presently says, "I would not give my sanction to a long betrothal. 'Tis a time that wears a woman's heart away more than men can know. I would not have an expeditious courtship, for love hath its seasons like the year, and sometimes the flower that blossoms brightly to-day is dead on the morrow. Passion should be watched beyond its maturity, for 'tis then we can see what promise it bears to outlive the season that brought it to its height. But too much is worse than too little. It is better to marry soon, than to marry late; and it is better not to love at all, than to love with slow fulfilment; for love is apt to slumber on the bosom of delay."

I thought, but would not say, lest I should appear too great a cynick, that it was better to regard love as a mere auxiliary of ambition, than to pamper it into a mastery of the will. Let ambition ride in his chariot, and let love be the running footman to clear the way. It is a treacherous passion, and should be kept under; for as when fitly disciplined it becomes your abject

slave, so when bred in indulgence it becomes the most despotick master ; as men, who proving your most obedient, humble servants in their indigence, stand forth as the most tyrannick of wretches in the days of prosperity.

“There are,” she presently says, as though glancing at without interpreting my thoughts, “who advise a woman to keep her love under controul, to fortify the understanding with maxims of wisdom, and so prepare the reason for the shock of disappointment, which they would have her meditate with the same concern she would meditate the stroke of death ; so that should love prove false, philosophy will be at hand to teach her how to support her care, or her judgment will be so trained as to calmly dismiss the passion, like a landlord ejects a tenant for the forfeiture of his promise. But ’tis a reasonable song Mr. Bracebridge once writ ;” and here she recited, in a plaintive voice, whose mournfulness made a melody though it discover’d no tune, these words, with which I was afterwards favoured with a copy :—

“As when within the warrior’s breast
The foeman’s fatal dart is buried,

If from the wound the dart you wrest,
The warrior to his death is hurried ;
So now, since Damon in her heart
A lodgment 's found, and Chloe 's willing,
Sure should you force him to depart,
You 'd find your kindness more than killing."

Then she smiled with a tender sweetness, and repeated,

"Sure should you force him to depart,
You 'd find your kindness more than killing,"

with a moving pathos of speech I could not but be sensible of; and regarding her narrowly, I witnessed a tear roll down her cheek, which she would not brush away, lest I should remark she was weeping. I wonder'd to see her shed tears. Methought 'twould need something stronger than love to distil a spirit like mine through my eyes. I would gladly have taken her care, and given her my unconcern, could I have environ'd myself with the splendid luxuries of which she was mistress. Yet the thought of such an exchange was paltry and beneath me, since it was not to be compass'd; for I was ever resolute to bend my thought to what was practicable, and to withhold it from speculations which were as

unprofitable as the soap bubbles that take the gilding of the sun and then explode. Yet I could not help wondering at her tears, though I guessed her childishness was caused by her blindness.

Just then there entered Dr. Aston, who led my Lady Ringwood by the hand. I rose and curtsied, and received their bows, and my lady being disposed on her velvet chair, which had an air of state through its gilt carvings and embroidered back, Dr. Aston stepp'd up to me, and taking my hand, welcomed me to what he was pleased to call my new home.

"It is a comfort," says he, "to think my daughter has now a companion;" and in a whisper adds, "her blindness makes her life a long idleness, but your good-nature will give her diversion, and your affection for her, which I doubt not will be of rapid growth, will make you studious to clear from her mind the clouds that sometimes darken it."

"Do not fear, sir," I replied; "it would not be in humanity not to feel the tenderest sympathy with so sad an infirmity as blindness; yet such are Miss Aston's charms and sweetness, that blindness in her becomes a grace, and not the

hardest heart but must be melted into love for the soft and exquisite air that lends so much beauty and nobleness to misfortune."

"'Tis true," he answer'd, regarding her with a look of fondness, while my speech suffused his face with rather the light than the presence of a smile; "she has in her carriage and air hints of an heroick nature that lift her above sympathy; and we, who come to lament her privation of sight, are left to marvel at the provision nature makes for infirmity, whether express'd by superiority of mind, by greater shrewdness in the faculties that are unimpair'd, or by that power of serene endurance which has in all ages, and particularly amongst the ancients, been accounted the keystone of intellectual greatness."

Then stepping to his daughter, he raised her hand and kissed it, as a lover might that of his mistress, and passing his fingers with a lingering gentleness over her hair, turned from her and left the room.

There was a lofty and well-bred air in Dr. Aston that was particularly pleasing; and, as Mr. Boothby would say, he seemed born to confirm the tradition of that race of stately and high-

mannered gentlemen who flourished before the first Hanoverian king arrived at these shores to debauch the understandings of our nation with his nauseous idiom and gross retainers. He was above the middle stature, moulded to an elegant shape, with a very powerful but open brow, calm yet shrewd eyes, a firm mouth, and white plump hands; his dress was fine without foppishness; his feet were small, a circumstance of which he seemed proud by wearing small buckles instead of the absurd large ornaments which, though before design'd to keep on the shoe, make the shoe now of no use but to keep on the buckle. I make no doubt but in his youth he was a very pretty fellow; and, indeed, though now near fifty years old, he preserved much of his handsome looks, and had he attended more to the decoration of his face, might have passed for ten years younger.

When he was gone, my Lady Ringwood called me to her, and bidding me take a seat at her side (she being hard of hearing) inquir'd my age. Being told, she demanded whether my mother was living, and who she was; but knowing the contempt with which people of quality regard the

whole society of stage-players, I was careful to swerve in my answer, by informing her that my mother was dead, and that so long, I could scarce call her to mind.

“Ah, child !” she cries, “then thou hast never known a mother’s tenderness ! ’Tis an ill-omen in a woman’s life for her mother to die young ; no father can supply her loss ; for what should men know of the world except its extremes of pleasure and misery ? A woman’s sensibilities have an exquisite perception ; she hath instincts that are wiser than experience, and faith that is profounder than knowledge. She is the minute hand upon the dial of life. She scores the seconds, but a man can only score the hours.”

“’Tis true,” says Miss Aston from the sofa ; “but a man has much to compass, and life is short. But a woman’s ends are small, and she has ample leisure for her achievements. For the busy purposes of life the dial that scored but the seconds would be found but an useless timepiece. ’Tis the broad hours we must see knotch’d ; for too much minuteness is dilatory, and great things can only be accomplish’d by great strides.”

“Each to its purpose,” said I ; “man for the

broad strokes and women for the delicate touches. 'Tis bass and treble make melody ; and woman is the accompaniment that sets man to musick. Yet as my lady says, women are more knowing than men by being more subtil ; for much lies unobserv'd by a man that woman takes notice of ; and 'tis this education makes a mother's hint to her daughter a magazine of wisdom, whilst her father's instruction will profit her nothing."

I flatter'd myself that by agreeing in the sentiments of my lady, I should be in a fair way of winning her good will ; for I knew that old age is slow in its judgments ; and must have other propulsion than that of its taste to hasten its decision. And for the moment I believ'd I had made the impression I wished, for her eyes were turned on me with a look which I mistook for admiration ; but I was soon undeceived, for she suddenly cried out,

"Lard, child ! what should you know of these matters ? you was saying you never knew a mother's care, and yet you speak to the thing as confidently as if your experience was great. What you say is true ; yet I distrust too much knowledge of life in young lips." And then tossing

up her little dainty shod feet, she says, "A miss in her teens hath now the knowledge of an old woman when I was young. I know not how they pick up so much learning; but methinks like hens that hunt for grain, they have to scratch at many dunghills to find the food they cram themselves with!"

Miss Aston uttered a gentle, rebuking laugh; but my lady was not to be diverted from the purpose of her mood; and so she proceeded:—

"But it is not only with girls the world has changed. We have got to the summit of the mountain, and are now hasting down to the ruin that yawns below. Look you, my dear, I would have you to know I am too much a Christian to rail at the misfortunes of my kind; but it is not in flesh to witness the doings of this age and keep silent. Where's the polite society gone that flourish'd fifty years past? Why, into the city to look for fortunes, whilst the pert, low-born cits have come to the West-end to occupy the houses of the people of quality. In my day a tradesman was a sober, respectable person; he knew his condition and did not trespass beyond it. For his treats he was satisfied with a ride on a

Moorfields hack, at eighteen-pence a side, and twice a year would carry his family to Edmonton and Hornsey; his holiday fare was a plum-pudding and a loin of veal, and his drink elder or raisin wine; he was a man, my dear, who paid his bills; his son was taught to despise Latin and was well-grounded in Cocker, which was sure all the learning he needed to carry on his father's business; his daughter was instructed in every kind of needle-work, and was not above waiting at table when the maid was at a show. But your modern tradesman, forsooth, is a *clubman*; he is above his shop and leaves his 'prentices to ruin his custom; he cultivates the friendship of the under-players, hath a box at the opera, foots it at Ranelagh, takes his wife and daughters to the monthly assembly, and in the summer months visits Brighthelmstone or Bath, dressed in toupet, snuff-box, and sword-knot. He drinks claret and Madeira, hath a footman in livery to serve him, walks in the minuet step, and converses in recitativo. The *young lady*, as he styles his daughter, is sent to a boarding-school, of which the mistress is the wife of a broken exciseman, where French is taught by a Swiss or an Irish

papist, the learned languages by a Welsh curate, dancing by a *valet de chambre*, and musick by a puppet-show fiddler."

My power of laughing inwardly left me to enjoy this ridiculous farrago, though my countenance wore that livery of gravity which befits a dependant at a mistress's discourse.

"'Tis the business of us moderns," she continued, after fetching her breath, "to excel our neighbours in folly and extravagance; so that, until we are ruined and undone, we know not where the victory lies. We pride ourselves on our vices, as beggars do on their natural defects; for among them a man that hath lost one leg yields to him that hath lost two; whilst he that hath nothing left but his head and trunk is esteemed as the king of the calling. There was a sailor that had but one leg, and no arms, who went to a hunchback and ask'd him his daughter in marriage; to which master hunchback replied, he was very sensible of the honour the sailor intended him, but that his daughter was now receiving overtures from a man who crawl'd with his hinder parts in a porridge-pot. This is an excellent illustration of our modern

tastes: for sure he that is wholly a cripple in his mind and fortune is more highly esteemed than he that is but partially so."

"It is possible, madam," said I, "that the world has grown weary of the customs that our forefathers were used to: and have resolv'd to seek their diversion by reversing familiar truths, like a brat that finds entertainment in looking at a prospect through his legs."

"He! he! he! Why, my dear, 'tis much as you put it," she cries.

"But you'll allow we are in advance of our forefathers in near all those points that promote civilization," says Miss Aston.

"Eh? in advance—what's that?" replies my lady. "Sure, child, thou art not serious."

"My own belief, madam," I said, "is, that the world, like old age, grows more foolish as it grows older. I doubt but Miss Aston is of your ladyship's opinion in esteeming our forefathers above us in wisdom."

'Twas a wound I had dealt; but my agreeing in her opinions was like clapping on a styptick that saved the hæmorrhage. Yet the reference to old age growing foolish kept her still for

a little; though ere long she turns upon Miss Aston, and says, but more quietly,—

“In what, Dolly, are we in advance of our fathers? I doubt but you’ll find, if you inquire, that it is but conceit that gives us this notion. We are heirs of the past; but it was the past that made the fortune we’ve entered upon. But as an inheritor is ever more puff’d up with his possessions than he that first acquired them, so we vaunt as discoveries what are given ready-made to our hands. God forbid I should speak ill of my fellows; but sure the present race of men are no better than a tribe of atheists, having no fear because they have no belief, having no modesty because they have no sense, professing claims without having pretensions, perk’d up with Jackanape airs, and more empty of real knowledge than the suckling was in my day.”

“Nay, granny dear,” answer’d Miss Aston, “it is not so indeed; there are wise men and true to be met in the world yet.”

“Ay, Dolly,” replies my lady, “and there were wise men and true to be met in Noah’s ark; but there was a great number of beasts.” Then catching me up as I was about to speak,

"I doubt," she cries, "but you'll find little solid parts in the world now-a-days. There's much tinsel, but tinsel isn't gold; and when you strip the glistening decoration, you'll find as much to sorrow as to sneer over. If our forefathers had less parade of learning, they had more common sense; observation, practice, and earnestness, my dear, did the work in those days which pertness, ignorance, and pretension do in these. In the healing arts 'twas possible for a man to cure a distemper, though he had never heard of Galen or Hippocrates; and if he had a prescription to write, plain wholesome English might serve. But now our pills, mixtures, apozems, and what not, are administered in Latin: the doctor abbreviates the words because he don't know the terminations; and the apothecary, who has less learning still, mistakes the doctor's scrawl and poisons the patients he sends his drugs to. And all this, my dear, is true of more than medicine; we are all being poisoned by wrong doses of philosophy, ethicks, criticism, religion, taste, and the fine arts, by a pack of ignorant wretches who methinks are fit only to lose their ears at the pillory for their cleverness."

I was now wearying of this long invective, for I could not discern its purpose, unless it was to prove that as there are eggs that become rotten by being sat on too long by hens, so there are heads that grow addled by the too-lengthened incubation of time. I was never a lover of such human anachronisms as my lady; my sense of fitness made me quick to espy incongruities; and 'twas wearying to have to listen to my lady's declamation against the age, likened by my taste to an agreeable musick, which her chattering vexed with discord. 'Twas politick, however, that my countenance should suggest that attention I could readily believe her vanity demanded. But to simulate attention for a long period is an intolerable labour; and in particular when you perceive that your voluble orator is but a mere windy sophist, whose flimsy cobweb could be rent by a breath.

Happily 'twas now near the dinner time; and my lady's departure to her chamber broke up the tedious society.





CHAPTER V.

Concerning various conversations; including the introduction of a celebrated character.

THERE dined that day with Dr. Aston a gentleman of whose celebrity I was not aware, though my attention was drawn to him at the commencement by his great ugliness. He had a huge wen just under his poll, of which the discovery seemed to give him so little uneasiness, that he wore a wig which did not cover half his head. His eyes were protruded like those of a crab's, and between one of these and his nose was room for another wen. He was dressed in embroidered figured velvets, shirtsleeves, high cuffs and buckram skirts. Yet by his easy, unembarrass'd air, 'twas plain he was in nowise disturb'd by his ugliness, if indeed he was sensible of it. He laugh'd and joked and procured himself to be watched more than a man that was conscious of his ill features might have ventured on. It was

strange I did not catch his name, which yet was four or five times severally repeated by Dr. Aston and my lady, both of whom seemed vastly entertained by his company. And indeed he exhaled the aroma of good-breeding in all his manners, putting me in mind of an ugly herb with a sweet savour ; whilst his wit, though keen, was always delicate, and his humour never impertinent. He spoke particularly of Dr. Johnson, the great author of "The Rambler," for whom it was plain he bore no love ; and told a story, that when the Dictionary was in hand, the Doctor was in debt to a milkman, who sent to arrest him ; but the sage being apprised of the fellow's design, brought down his bed and barricadoed the door, and from a top window harangued the bailiffs, asserting his intention to defend his little citadel to the utmost.

When we were withdrawn, Miss Aston, on my demanding who the gentleman was at table, replied that his name was Mr. Soame Jenyns, that he was the author of some excellent works on religion and some elegant poems. I said that I was acquainted with his name, but not with his writings ; on which she bid me go to the library and fetch her a volume, whose position she indi-

cated with as much accuracy as though she had her sight. I procured the volume, and found it to contain some sprightly pieces, and particularly a performance, writ with great skill, intituled the "Art of Dancing." I diverted Miss Aston and myself by reading a portion of this poem aloud to her, whilst my lady sat in her chair straining her ear to listen; nor would I cease, even when I was wearied, lest my lady, whose face betokened an itch for argument, should lay hold on a passage for a text, under which to gall me with a tedious heterodoxical discourse.

With the gentlemen there arrived Mr. Bracebridge, who, it was clear, stood on no ceremony in that house. I was curious to see him, for it was owing to him I was Miss Aston's confidante; and besides, I could not but look on a man whose honour was too nice to suffer him to wed a fortune without matching it with another, as an oddity that would be well worth knowing.

I was ever quick to receive many details in a glance; and the look I darted at Mr. Bracebridge at once satisfied my curiosity as to his person. He was an extremely handsome young man, of a graceful mien, tall and erect, with well-propor-

tioned limbs, and altogether most manly. He had a face that reminded me of an admirable bust of Apollo that stood in the hall; the nose straight, the upper lip curl'd, the brow low, but white and shapely; his eyes were blue, and wore a roguish look that seem'd to throw a smile on the rest of the lineaments, though their repose was undisturb'd. He was dressed in the height of the mode; in a mixed silk coat, pink satin waistcoat, white silk stockings with pink clocks, and mushroom-colour'd stock, cover'd with fine point lace. Yet what was foppery in others was elegance in him; for nature had put it beyond the power of his taste to injure the beauty of his person.

He approached Miss Aston first, and raising her hand with courtier-like elegance, kissed it; whilst he whispered some words that lit up her face with a rosy smile, like a crimson light shining through transparent alabaster. Then he made a low bow to my Lady Ringwood, who curtsied to him with a grand air; and a bow to me on Dr. Aston introducing us. After which, stepping up to Miss Aston, he languidly seated himself next her, and fell to conversing in whispers.

Mr. Jenyns seeing me alone, came and stood

before me, and ask'd what book I held ; which I answer'd by letting him see it. He was well pleas'd to perceive his own poems ; and inquired if the book was mine. On my replying it was Dr. Aston's, he said he would do himself the honour to send me a copy ; though, said he, " I think I can do better now than some of the stuff the book holds, for I was young when I wrote it."

" Sure, sir," said I, " you could not improve on the ' Art of Dancing ' !"

" Why, madam," he replied, " as to that, I know not whether the ' Art of keeping still ' would not make a better poem."

" What," cried I, " are those the sentiments of the poet who sang—

' Hail, loveliest art ! that canst all hearts ensnare,
And make the fairest still appear more fair ! ' "

" Ah, madam," he answer'd, " ' tis cruel to retort on me with an arrow stolen from my own quiver. But what we like in youth we are apt to look sullenly on in old age. Gout is the exorciser of all such levities."

" Sir," I answer'd, " you should not apostatize from the faith of your youth. Terpsichore, of

which your poem makes you the high-priest, was the idol at which your muse offer'd her incense ; and now, because the incense is all burnt out, you are for levelling the goddess."

"Nay, madam, I am willing to abide by my traditions ; but he is a different poet now confronts you from him who sang the 'Art of Dancing.' Let young Mr. Jenyns exult if he will in the inglorious triumph of his numbers ; old Mr. Jenyns has got wisdom, and would not be thought the advocate of frivolity."

Just then Dr. Aston coming up, ask'd me if I would take a hand at whist ; I answer'd, with some confusion, that I knew no games but ombre and picquet ; on which Mr. Jenyns said he would take dummy against my lady and the doctor ; so with a bow to me, he went away, and presently was deeply engaged in forcing an ill temper on my lady.

Meanwhile I had not been unobservant of Mr. Bracebridge, though I doubt not Mr. Jenyns imagined I saw no one in the room but the author of the "Art of Dancing." From time to time I could see Mr. Bracebridge cast demure glances, as a brat might look who plays bo-peep, though our

eyes did not meet. I would well like to have sat in some obscure corner and watched the two lovers; for Mr. Bracebridge's resolution to delay his marriage had bred in me an unspoken suspicion of the genuineness of his love. To be plain, I could not think on love but as an eager, selfish, determined passion, which, however worthy, will always find a conscience for outrunning honour.

Politeness would not long suffer Mr. Bracebridge to witness me alone; so turning his head, he says,—

“It is somewhat rare, madam, to meet with a young lady who loves dancing so well as Miss Boothby, who is yet ignorant of cards.”

“I am not ignorant of cards, sir,” I replied; “but of whist, which is but one among many games. As for dancing, I am free to confess I regard it as a most ravishing diversion.”

“’Tis a pleasant pastime,” says Miss Aston, with a sigh.

“Which dance is your favourite, madam?” he asks.

“I am the most partial to the Rigadoon,” I said.

“Give me the Louvre,” says he.

“The Rigadoon for lovers, and the Louvre for married folk,” I replied, with a smile.

Methought a roguish light shone full in his blue eye; but vanished like a star upon a moving mirror. Presently he cries :

“I have not yet spoke to you of your father, madam. You know he saved my life? How does he? Shall we see him here? I would wait upon him did I know his house.”

“He is well, sir,” I answered. But being unwilling that Mr. Bracebridge should visit him at his mean lodgings, “Now that I am gone,” I said, “I doubt not he will leave his residence which has accommodation above his wants.”

“You must bid him come and see me, dear,” says Miss Aston; “my thanks are still owing, and it would please me to convey them with my own lips.”

“He would fly to receive the honour, madam,” I replied, “was he to know your desire. But indeed he has already received more thanks than are his due, as he has confessed; and the return you have made him—Mr. Bracebridge in recommending, and you in receiving me—leaves him far more deeply your debtor than you are his.”

"No, no," cries Mr. Bracebridge, "we are still in his debt; for has he not conferr'd a further obligation by giving you leave to attend Miss Aston? Dolly was pouring your praises in my ear just now, and I am dumb for language to thank you for your handsome justification of my recommendation."

Here he bowed with a look at me in which there was much of roguery, and a little of shrewdness; I could have given him such a look too, but dissembled my powers until I should come to know him better.

"Yes," says Miss Aston, "it does not take long to discern merit; and I cannot deny, I am much flatter'd by possessing for a companion one who has so quickly proved herself entitled to my esteem."

I responded to this, and peeped at Mr. Bracebridge to note the direction of his gaze; 'twas fixt on me. The better to retain it, I kept still. As to these civilities, they were only to my taste so far as they showed I was likely to hold my situation; I took no concern as to their hollowness or sincerity; it was sufficient they manifested a willingness to be pleased; they also showed Miss

Aston thought I was of consequence enough to be complimented. But I was content to accept them only as fair indications of the future.

We were now disturbed by a loud chattering at the card-table. My lady having lost her money had lost her temper; and from abusing the cards had got to abusing Mr. Jenyns. Her old faded face was scorched and inflamed with resentment; and as she violently declaimed against her fortune in a strong, passionate voice, she twirled her rings with angry trembling hand upon her fingers, and kicked her little feet like an enraged babe that is denied the delight of feeding himself.

"Nay, madam, I must entreat—really—" says Mr. Jenyns, who strove no longer to dissemble his apprehension; "why, madam, my luck may be yours next time."

"Luck! prythee, don't talk to me of luck, sir!" cries out my lady. "Luck is a wanton hussey. Call her no longer *she*. I'll unsex her! The wench! she has gone over to the enemy man. Smile on her, sir! I give you joy of your new mistress!"

And rising, she curtsied to him with so enraged a smile, that methought I should die away with inward laughing.

"Nay, my dear—," says Dr. Aston, mildly.

"Nay, *you*, sir!" cries she. "'Tis you that have undone us! That revoke bred the dummy's luck."

"I am sorry, my dear. You shall take dummy against Mr. Jenyns and me."

"Oh, your humble servant. No, I'll have no more on't. Mr. Jenyns," says she, "your most obedient. I can't play with you, sir. You're too hot and play with an eagerness that confounds me. I like a cool player. I can play with my Lord Caroll, and I can play with Mr. Ffoulkes; for if they know how to win, they also know how to lose. But I cannot play with Mr. Jenyns."

Saying which, with another curtsey, she stepped from the table, and seated herself in her chair, and fell to violently fanning herself, with her under lip working from the pressure of many pent up feelings she dared not let loose in words.

Dr. Aston was visibly disconcerted by my lady's behaviour; but if he offered Mr. Jenyns no apology, it was, I suppose, because he judged that gentleman's good sense would find my lady's best excuse in her years.

The two gentlemen being risen from the table

came over to us ; and Dr. Aston, designing to relieve the general sense of discomfort, begged to hand me to the spinet. Though I could not deny him, yet I wondered he should know I could perform. Perhaps he was too much confused to ask, or perhaps he meant a compliment to my understanding by inferring my acquaintance with musick from my other accomplishments. I went through a piece by Corelli, which I had by rote ; and though I knew the company were listening, I laboured under no modest timidity, for I considered that if there was one present who could perform better, he would see merit in my performance as a foil for his own execution ; and if there was no one could play as well, I was not in danger of being judged, for who should be my critick ?

When I was finished, Mr. Jenyns and Mr. Bracebridge came to my side, and thank'd me for obliging them ; Mr. Bracebridge in so engaging a manner, that I was sensible of a glow of pleasure as I listened to his address, and durst not lift my eyes, lest they should discover more than was proper they should reveal.

But my Lady Ringwood, who sat sourly look-

ing on us, had no taste for foreign musick, as she took care to inform the company.

“For her part,” she said, “she never could be brought to encourage those Italian and French folk; nor could she see any merit in Cuzzoni, unless it was her squat figure; nor in Farinelli, unless a tall awkwardness be a virtue; she’d rather hear Beard or Brent before the finest and choicest of those foreign kickshaws.”

Mr. Jenyns was in no temper to handle an argument with her, but Mr. Bracebridge cries—

“I’ll allow Mr. Beard hath a fine voice; but sure your ladyship will not deny Mingotti is the sweetest charmer that ever sang.”

“Not I, sir!” she answered. “And I’m glad to feel in my old age that my dislike of frogs and wooden shoes is as great as when I was young; for by that I know I’ve lost nothing of my British spirit. Give me ‘The Lads of Dunce,’ or ‘Young Damon, once the Happiest Swain,’ before all your foreign nauseous mixtures.”

Thinking to put her in a good temper, Mr. Bracebridge said he would sing a catch writ by a gentleman of Oxford, his friend, to the air of “The Jolly Swain will Whistle” :—

“The great, imperial halls contain,
The poor lie cold in jail;
The knave gets drunk upon champagne,
The honest man on ale.
And prating fools are reckoned wise,
And wisdom has no ken;
The rector rats the bishop’s eyes,
And the curate cries Amen!”

This set every one a laughing, and even my lady, though she strove awhile with her merriment, was fain to smile at last. Indeed nothing tickled her humour more than abuse of the present age, unless it was a panegyrick on the past. Seeing that she had recovered her spirits, Dr. Aston stepped over to her, intending by some soft speeches to confirm her in her good temper; Mr. Jenyns applied himself to Miss Aston, and Mr. Bracebridge came to me.

“’Tis a pettish old woman,” he says, softly. “I doubt but her ladyship’s husband was glad to die.”

“My lady’s ripe age, sir,” I replied, “is her excuse. Besides, she may have begun life with a sour temper, in which she would resemble a quince that grows tarter as it gets age.”

“Or,” says he, “she may have begun life with a generous temper, in which she would re-

semble a sweet wine that turns acid by long exposure. I should not love to have my home darkened by the presence of such an old putt."

"Then, sir, you will not let her live with you when you are married to Miss Aston?"

"What do you know of my marriage with Miss Aston? Who told you, madam, I should marry her?"

"It was you who told my papa, who informed me; and Miss Aston hath spoke to me on the matter."

"And what does Dolly say?" he ask'd.

"Nay, sir," said I, "would you not have me keep my secrets?"

"But 'tis my secret."

"Then, sir, you had better apply to Miss Aston."

But thinking was he to do so, she would rebuke me for repeating our secret conversation, or that it would make her cautious as to how she opened herself to me again, I said:—

"Well, sir, since I have excited your curiosity, it is just I should appease it. In Miss Aston you have a very devoted mistress, who repines at the delay your nice honour imposes on your

union. Now, sir, that you have my confession, do not betray me."

"You may trust me. But," says he, "you spoke of my *nice* honour. Was you not ironical?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried I. "'Twould be a privilege beyond my wages to speak with two meanings."

"Nay," says he, adjusting his lace ruffles, and eyeing me with a close and thoughtful regard, "I'll not be put off. It pleases me to hear the constructions placed upon my conduct. I am always eager to learn how far the world is foolish and how far it is wise. You, who are Miss Aston's confidant, must be mine. We must be friends, madam. Your eyes sparkle with a sagacity that discovers a disciplined and observant mind, and makes me to see your reprehensions would be more profitable than your flattery. Now, madam, do you speak ironically of my *nice* honour?"

"I spoke, sir, in commendation. I doubt but there are few gallants that would find a conscience for delaying their union with a fortune. 'Twould hardly be credible in this age. Carry such a conscience to the market-place, and it

would be pilloried for an hypocrite and pelted for its avowals."

"What of that, madam ? All worthiness would meet with such treatment in this age. But you tell me the opinions of others, not your own."

"Sir," said I, "it is no business of mine."

I lifted my eyes to his face. It wore a pensive look. He folded his hands and stood contemplating me without speech for several moments ; then, as if breaking out of a reverie, he started, looked uneasily about him, and with a low bow moved towards Miss Aston.

I was not disposed to meditate his behaviour yet. He had not rendered himself clear enough to enable me to form my judgement. I was not one to use despatch in my decisions ; for I ever thought there was no opinion so mean but that did not demand the most cautious deliberation, by which I gave magnitude to all my judgements, and took care to approach them with a high notion of their significance, lest I should go astray. I considered the mind as a perspective-glass, which demands a careful regulation of the tubes, that the objects surveyed be not confused, nor seen in an haze.

Mr. Jenyns, seeing the lovers together, approached my lady, and Dr. Aston came to me. I lamented that I could not enjoy more leisure; for I desired narrowly to watch Mr. Bracebridge's behaviour to his mistress; and had plann'd that by changing my seat, I could turn my back on them, and yet observe their countenances and movements in a mirrour.

"I am glad, madam," says Dr. Aston, "to find you alone; I have had it in my mind to speak with you this evening, for my time is much occupied in the day, and it is rare I can find leisure for conversation.

Being curious to hear what he had to say, I assumed a look of polite attention, and he proceeded thus:—

"You must know, madam, that my daughter's helplessness occasions me great uneasiness when I reflect upon my death, which, whether sudden or lingering, may not be far distant. She will indeed possess a fortune that will make her mistress of as much happiness as money can procure; for you have to consider that blindness cannot be prodigal, its enjoyments are circumscribed, and even a narrow revenue would

serve to supply them. But there is a happiness no money can buy—I mean the joy of wedded love, that feeling of security which every true woman feels that has a loving husband to lean on and turn to in her hours of weakness and sorrow.”

“’Tis beyond money, sir,” I said.

“It is,” he replied; “and that is why I could wish her married to Mr. Bracebridge. I will not deny but that I have sometimes secretly resented his procrastination as an impertinence; for, having prov’d his honour, he has rais’d it beyond the risk of impeachment; and might now easily enter upon his marriage, and find in my solicitude and his own passion such an excuse as should readily remove every conscientious scruple. He does me no honour by this delay; for it discovers an apprehension that we should hereafter charge him with his dependence. His scruples are boyish; his apprehensions unmanly. More than I have already said, my delicacy will not permit me to urge. But my love for my daughter is great, madam. I know that she secretly repines at Mr. Bracebridge’s delay, though she will not avow it; ’twould not be maidenly indeed; and

this secret uneasiness will, I fear, impair her health, and breed a malady beyond the power of emulsions and cathartics."

"I cannot question that your apprehensions are just, sir," I said; "and you at least would know."

"If she loved him less," continued he, "I would not be so eager to push their betrothal to an issue,—let them riot in their courtship so long as they chose; if they broke, their hearts would be left whole. But, madam, her mind has so long fed upon love, that without its customary nutriment it would grow lean and sickly.

'amores

A tenero meditatur ungui.'

Her blindness informs her moods with sentiment; for she can find no distraction in what passes around her, but lives an ideal life, of which we that have our sight can be no judge. All this puts me upon the necessity of seeking your assistance. It is plain your intelligence is more than ordinary. Our acquaintance is indeed short, but it needs no great time to discover quickness of wit and superiority of parts; and you are dis-

tinguished by both these qualities. It may be in your power to exert them in favour of my daughter by helping forward this marriage, and breaking down the idle scruples with which Mr. Bracebridge barricades himself from his marriage. (Methinks he treats love rather as a bailiff than a deity.) If you achieve this you shall not go unrewarded, either by thanks or by gratitude in a more substantial shape. Your penetration will set you right in the going about this matter; and if I may judge from your wit and understanding, it will not be long before your success gives me occasion to be your humble, obliged servant."

"Sir," I answered, "it will always be my pleasure to serve you, and I know of no more delightful office you could set me to than promoting the happiness of Miss Aston; but I could desire to hint that this duty will demand a finer delicacy and a shrewder penetration than I may be mistress of. You are putting me to play upon an instrument strung to so exquisite a degree of sensitiveness that only the daintiest hand could save its musick from discord. It is particularly to Mr. Bracebridge I shall have to

address myself. I must endeavour to divert his prejudices into the channel of your desires ; I must be the interpreter of the dumb-show between the lovers, and must impart significance wherever significance seems necessary ; above all, I must be studious to dissemble my interest in the issue, or I should grow odious to him as a conspirator, which would rob my endeavours of all their efficacy. The task is a difficult one, sir."

"To many," he replied, "it would be impracticable ; but not to you, madam. You have, by your forcible exposition of my wishes, proved your capacity for the undertaking ; and I am free to confess my delight at having secured so able and judicious a coadjutor in this affair as yourself."

He then left me, either for fear that our prolonged conference should breed suspicion in Mr. Bracebridge, who constantly directed his eyes towards us, or that I should raise objections to his scheme, and so mar his hopes. And indeed the scheme was idle enough, and impracticable to a Machiavel ; and was a suggestion that could be occasioned only by the fondness of a father ; for however delicately I might work, it would

be impossible but Mr. Bracebridge's suspicions would be excited. He would naturally inquire what interest I could have in the affair, and failing to discover, would conclude I was working under the stimulus of a reward. If I desir'd to make him hate me, I could not have hit upon a better method to procure his disgust and contempt. 'Twas a foolish whim; but as I say, the father was fond of his daughter. He might probably witness in this long betrothal the germ of a disease that, like a gangrene, was presently to fasten upon the whole body, and so snatch'd at any fantastick remedy his affection might breed.

Yet he had no need to leave me so abruptly, if he fear'd I should deny him; for though I knew I should work him and his no good with the stratagem he had suggested, I myself might grasp it as the handle of a lever, with which, by a dexterous adjustment of my energies, I might possibly before long raise myself a fortune and a position.





CHAPTER VI.

Containing matter rather surprising than pleasing.

MY Lady Ringwood, though a difficult and peevish gamester, was yet so enamoured of cards that Dr. Aston, to divert her, would frequently entertain company. These would assemble of an evening; and if fortune was propitious my lady would continue to push the diversions of the night far into the gray light of the morning. But there was an elegant chamber lay close to the library, and to the left hand of Dr. Aston's reception-room, where my lady would hold her morning's assemblies. Here through the forenoon her guests would froth their chocolate and rattle the dice at hazard. But to these assemblies I was not bidden, and as Miss Aston never joined them, I could contrive no excuse to be present; though I should have liked well to have courted fortune among the elegant men who came to kill a morning at my lady's tables.

My time was well occupied with attending on Miss Aston. When the bell rang for her maid, I repaired to her chamber, and during her toilet read to her from the journals or from books. We commonly breakfasted in her boudoir, then went abroad to take the air, sometimes afoot, sometimes in the chariot. When there was no company we dined at three, but rarely an evening came without bringing guests.

My life was luxurious, but my restless and ambitious thoughts impaired the charm of ease. Yet neither by my voice nor by my conduct did I discover my inward perturbations; and it would have demanded a powerful keen eye to detect beneath my tranquil exterior a soul alive and trembling with boundless desires, and a turgid conscience ready to be pawned at the whisper of ambition.

Miss Aston was all sweetness and elegance. Her very condescension was endearing. Her dominion was over a realm populated by dreams. Her mind was like—

“Some silent shore
Where billows never beat nor tempests roar.”

Amid this intellectual tranquillity she moved and

had her being. It diffused itself through her speech, which was soft and dreamy ; it rendered gentle and serene her countenance ; nay, in her very gestures 'twas visible, as in the folding of her hands upon her lap, which put her in an attitude of prayer, by the placid eloquence of the movement and posture.

It was plain such a character would rarely discover its uneasiness by speech ; its suffering would find no outlet in syllables ; it became a portion of her nature rather than an extrinsic quality, as in others, which may be removed like a distemper by the proper application. It was as though you should feed a flower with a poisonous nutriment, that mingles with its juices and sickens the whole body. Having spoke to me once on her betrothal, she avoided the subject after ; and though on that occasion her tranquillity had made it impossible for me to witness any pain in her avowal, yet did I afterwards judge that it must have given her pain. But I suppose she thought it right to acquaint me with what I must presently discover by myself, and chose I should know the plain truth from her, rather than exaggerate or pervert it by my own fancy.

A few days after my installation, Mr. Boothby call'd to make his compliments to Miss Aston. I was pleas'd with his appearance, which indeed was above the cavil of the most fastidious, though I wondered how he had contrived it ; for he had attired himself in an handsome silk coat, with embroidered cuffs, a finely powdered wig, Manchester fine stuff breeches, and clouded silk stockings. Miss Aston presented her hand to him, which he respectfully saluted, and enter'd upon a conversation with ease and politeness. Dr. Aston was within when he called, and presently entering where we were met, shook hands very heartily with him, and desir'd he would remain to dinner. This Mr. Boothby politely declined, protesting he had a particular engagement beyond Temple Bar ; though I did not doubt a dinner would have prov'd welcome, for he looked thin, as though rather used to the shins of beef in the cellars than the more fattening fare of the ordinaries. Yet I secretly commended his discretion in refusing ; it showed a manly independence above the capacity of many beaux with better opportunities of living ; and I judg'd Dr. Aston would be pleased with an acquaint-

ance whom it was necessary to court rather than repel.

But Dr. Aston's hospitality was not to be diverted; and on being press'd to name a day, Mr. Boothby express'd his readiness to dine with him on Friday; that was three days after.

"Why," says Dr. Aston, "I'm glad you've named that day, for I am reminded we shall be entertaining some guests whom you will not be displeased to meet."

Soon after this, Mr. Boothby took his leave; and I remark'd, as he stepp'd to the door, the rapid, comprehensive glance he cast around the apartment. Methought he would have more to admire and wonder at when he should see the library.

Next day Dr. Aston, being on his rounds, and my lady abroad in her chair, Miss Aston, having complained of an headache, went to lie on her bed. I curtained the windows to dull the light, and sat by her side, ready to attend upon her wants. She could not bear me to read to her, as the sound of my voice gave her pain. Presently I judged by her regular respiration she was sleeping; so rising, I stole softly downstairs

to the library, knowing her bell would sound when she awaked.

The library was a never ending diversion to me. I had Dr. Aston's permission to read, though not to remove the books from the room; but there was much entertainment to be procured without reference to the book-shelves, for the beauty of the various sculpture was ever fresh, and it was my amusement to mimic, in my form, the graceful attitudes of some of the figures, and would pose myself before them, an eager student of their lovely attitudes.

I was throwing myself in a languishing posture before the white and shining statue of Cleopatra, when there fell a sharp knock upon the house door. I was for running to Miss Aston's room; then decided to wait. If it was a visitor Miss Aston would be denied. I put my ear to the keyhole, and presently heard Mr. Bracebridge. He ask'd for Miss Aston; the footman led him to the drawing-room; there was a delay. Presently the man knocks on my door, and tells me Mr. Bracebridge is above; will Miss Aston see him? I replied that Miss Aston was asleep. The fellow took this message. Presently Mr.

Bracebridge comes to the library, where, suspecting he would arrive, I was careful he should find me in an elegant armchair, seated in a pensive attitude, with an handsome volume upon my knees.

He made me an elegant bow, begged pardon for intruding, protested he would not detain me from my book, but would I acquaint him if Miss Aston was unwell?

I answered "that she was indisposed with a headache; that I left her sleeping just now, but that I would go and wake her."

"Nay, I entreat you won't," said he; "if she has a headache, 'tis sleep,—

‘Tir'd nature's sweet restorer,'

as Dr. Young writ,—that is the best balm she can lay to her pain. I can wait here till she wakes, unless, madam, my company will rob you of the privacy you may have come here to enjoy."

"Sir," I answered, "I shall be glad of your company."

On this he took a chair. I cast my eyes upon the volume in my lap, but I could spy him through my lashes. He looked on me for a

while, casting his eyes on my feet, then on my gown, then on my hands, afterwards running them over my shape. Anon he stared about the room ; then said :—

“ If I was a scholar, madam, I might entertain you with a discourse on the charming antiquities that surround us. But unhappily my memory is like a sieve ; almost as much leaves it as enters. What it retains is commonly the refuse which it is the business of the sieve to catch.”

“ I must say,” I said, “ that I think Mr. Bracebridge unnecessarily depreciates his understanding.”

“ ’Fore gad, madam, ’tis true,” he cried. “ I am a great ignoramus ; and had I as little religion as I have learning, I should have all the qualifications of a fine gentleman. I protest I am for ever drowning in the strong tide of wisdom that pours from Miss Aston’s mind. I doubt not but you could overflow me in five minutes.”

“ How, Mr. Bracebridge ! Sir, in this room, surrounded by so many symbols of knowledge, I feel my insignificance, and stand at gaze like a child whose eye is on a book printed in He-

brew. I beg you'll not think me wise. If, sir, you should know how much 'tis in your power to teach me, you would rather pity my ignorance."

"Why," cried he, too well-bred to pretend to notice what I had not designed as a *double-entendre*, "what could such a dull fellow as I teach Miss Boothby?"

I lifted my eyes to his face, but took care not to let the lids open too wide, so that the expression that kindled in them might give him something to meditate. Without replying to his question, I said :—

"I could sit here for ever in the presence of so much beauty. Methinks the ancients must have had among them more beautiful females than the moderns can boast, to have instructed them in such shapes of loveliness as their sculptors and painters wrought."

"'Tis true," he answered, "that among them art shone as a triumphant and ravishing goddess. But art, madam, is only excellent by comparison with art. If nature be let loose upon her, she is speedily vanquished. One beautiful female form among the most exquisite sculptures sinks them into insignificance."

“Yes, sir ; whether that form be male or female.”

“Nay, madam,” he replied ; “what pretensions to beauty has man compared with woman ? There stands the statue of Cleopatra ; but if Miss Boothby will place herself next her, Cleopatra’s marble beauty is eclipsed like that of a star when the moon shines near it.”

I hung my head with an air of modest confusion ; though I felt no embarrassment, yet nature prettily counterfeited it by painting a blush upon my cheeks.

“I wish,” cried I, whilst I studied the elegant shape of his leg and the smallness of his foot, “that my beauty deserved your panegyrick. It would be truer was I to say that Mr. Bracebridge’s charms are such as to depress all these exquisite achievements of art into caricatures.”

“Ah !” says he, with a merry roguish laugh,

“‘Man flattering man not always can prevail ;
But woman flattering man can never fail.’”

But it was easy to see my compliment was to his liking ; for his eyes sparkled saucily, he held his head erecter, and a complacent smile show’d his regular teeth.

"It is to be lamented," I said, "that Miss Aston has not her sight. She misses much that gives relish to life. How enlarged would grow her vigorous understanding could she but contemplate the noble beauties with which her papa has filled his house!"

"I too have reason to lament her blindness," he answered. "'Tis well a woman should know more of the man she means to marry than his mind. Love takes delight in regarding the face and form of his mistress. Whilst the face is young and beautiful it is fuel to love's flame ; when it is no longer so it creates endearing associations, and hallows the present by the soft and tender recollections of the past. All this must be lost to Dolly."

"But," said I, "she has an active fancy, and from an acquaintance with your mind has form'd an ideal of your figure and countenance. She sees you with a mental eye ; and methinks it is better to be so seen, for the face reflected there neither disease can corrupt, nor time decay. It is like a little poem that preserves in itself all the magick of freshness and beauty, and is always ravishing, long after the hand that writ it is dust."

“Why,” cried he, “what a pretty advocate has Dolly found in you! But, madam, yours is a pitiless logic that turns conceit out of doors. A little vanity is to one’s nature what vermilion is to the complexion: ’tis a necessary portion of the mental toilet. But your logic would render one’s nature colourless.”

I could see his drift, but resolv’d to make him speak more plainly, that by laying himself more open, I could better observe where to strike with the greatest effect.

“How sir?” I said. “Pray how does my reasoning touch on vanity?”

“Why, to be plain with you, madam, ’tis sure every man relishes to be admired by the woman he loves. It is no satisfaction for him to know that his mistress has an ideal which she pets and recurs to for him. He would rather she saw his face, and admire at him for what he is. ’Tis proper an ugly fellow should be satisfied with a pretty substitute; but a man not destitute of grace cannot be contentedly put off with an ideal, when he knows that could his mistress see his face she would have no call to exercise her imagination.”

“You make me see it in another light,” said I,

with pretended seriousness; "and indeed I wonder I should have missed seeing it before. My own heart might have instructed me to such a view: for were I to love, I doubt not but my passion would be as much occasioned by my lover's person as by his understanding; and I should be sensible of but a barren satisfaction in contemplating, instead of my lover's eyes (whose lights and graces my own should mirror), the airy outlines of a vague ideal."

"Why, there it is!" he cried out. "Where shall love seek his renewal but in the countenance and figure of his mistress? 'Tis only love knows the ravishing duty imposed by passion of resolving those sweet enigmas which darken or illuminate the eye, wreath the mouth with smiles, or embellish it with pouts. To me, madam, this pleasure is denied. Hark you, I would have you to know I love Dolly dearly, yet I'd as lief fall to perusing the lineaments of that statue there as studying her face in moments of passion which, had she her sight, would render every feature eloquent."

My admiration for his countenance which methought grew more handsome as it grew more

familiar, put me upon watching him whilst he addressed me with more earnestness than I was sensible of; for not listening to his matter, but thinking of his eyes and the various beauties of his face, I continued contemplating him after he had paused, which did not fail to draw his attention to the stedfastness of my gaze. He gave me a sudden sweet smile, which broke the spell, and drove me back confused upon the sense of my indiscretion. But I speedily rallied, and, the better to appear at my ease, fell to turning over the pages of the book on my knee.

At that moment Miss Aston's bell rung. I was for hurrying away; but he got up and, taking my hand, detained me while he said:—

“Pray, dear madam, do not tell Dolly I have been here some time; better say I am just come. Love makes us testy; and she might hardly relish a knowledge of our *tête-à-tête*.”

I bowed my acquiescence and went away, carrying with me the warmth of his hand on mine, and the memory of the sudden sweet smile he had given me. Indeed they set my attention straying, for I had entered a room and approached the bed before I discovered I had mistaken my

lady's chamber for Miss Aston's. But the hint Mr. Bracebridge had given me, pleased me mightily. Oh, it diverted me, this hint of duplicity. It gave me intimation of a character which I did not doubt I could work with to a most profitable issue. Love I might have ridiculed, for I knew how vulnerable is love. But too much candour would have set me blundering; sturdy resolute truth would have turned the keenest of my darts: it was an armour I had no weapon that would pierce.

"Is that Miss Boothby?" cries out Miss Aston from the bed. I replied it was. "Then help me, my dear, to rise," says she; "for I am expecting Mr. Bracebridge this afternoon."

"Mr. Bracebridge is below, madam."

"Has he been here long?" she says, getting eagerly off the bed, and stretching forth her hand for me to lead her to a chair. "Why did you not wake me, my dear?"

"He has only now come," said I.

"And did you go to see him?" she asked.

"I was in the library, madam, when he called."

"Oh, then," says she, "oblige me by acquainting Mr. Bracebridge I will be with him shortly; and

if you will pull the bell, my maid will come to make me fit for him to see me, for I doubt but I'm sadly tossed by lying on the bed."

I did as she desired, and going downstairs, went to the library, where I found Mr. Bracebridge in the chair I had left, and looking into my book.

"Mr. Bracebridge," said I, "Miss Aston desires me to say she will be with you shortly; she is ill-pleas'd to think you should have been kept waiting for her."

"Did you tell her you was with me, madam?" he inquired.

"Sir," I answered, "I told her you was only just arrived when her bell rang."

"You did right," says he. "If Dolly knew the entertainment your sprightly company, madam, has provided me with, she'd not think it needful to apologize for my detention. Is she upstairs?" he asks, moving to the door.

"She is in her chamber," I replied; "but if you would prefer to see her in the drawing-room rather than here, I will tell her you are there."

"I am obliged to you, madam," he said; then stepping to the door, he laid hold on the han-

dle ; here he paused, afterwards turned his face round, and said,—“ Will you remain here, Miss Boothby ? ”

“ Sir,” I answered with a smile, “ I promise you, wherever I am, I’ll not spoil your sport. ’Tis always with reluctance I am a listener ; but if occasion give rise to that situation, my discretion may be depended on.”

“ You mistake me,” said he, stepping back, and fixing his fine eyes on my face with a look that was half languishing, half saucy. “ Do not think I would evade your society, but on the contrary would very eagerly court it. I wanted a word with you on parting, and if you was to be here on my leaving I would speak it.”

“ You will find me here, sir,” said I, with a slight curtsy, and curtaining my eyes with a softness as I directed them to his.

He snatched my hand with a quick movement, and pressed his lips to it ; ’twas done with so much sudden passion that the imprint left was red. I held it up before him, and said,—

“ It is well Miss Aston is blind, sir, for here is an hieroglyph it would not give her much joy to decipher.”

"It is no hieroglyph," says he, "but a legible and easily-read character. Sure *your* ingenuity is able to compass its meaning!"

Here he went out, and I followed him, but left him as he entered the drawing-room to mount to Miss Aston's chamber. I found her ready to descend. I took her hand, and conducted her to her lover. Her face kindled with a radiant smile when he pressed his customary kiss upon her hand; and, indeed, I wondered he should say there was no eloquence in her countenance, for it ever seemed to me that her pleasure found more pregnant syllables in her face than in her speech; whilst her sightless eyes imparted pathos and significance to her language beyond the power of joy or sorrow to confer.

I hung about for awhile near the windows, whilst they conversed in whispers, but whenever I looked towards them, I found Mr. Bracebridge stealing glances at me. I did not desire to leave too abruptly, though, indeed, I had no call to stay on; but presently, fearing my Lady Ringwood would return and detain me in conversation, I stepped over to Miss Aston, and acquainted

her with my desire to finish a chapter of a book in the library. So I went away; but not before I had received a look from Mr. Bracebridge that confused my face with a rosy blush, and sent me with a shy smile from the room.

In the library I fell to thinking over Mr. Bracebridge's behaviour; and though as yet I could find but a narrow basis to build on, 'twas impossible I could divert my mind from its speculations. I had vanity, but it was so well disciplined, I knew its promptings could never be insidious. My understanding acted to it as a stern pedagogue; and I was pleas'd, therefore, to receive its hints of the impression my beauty had made on Mr. Bracebridge, for I was aware it spoke the truth. As yet, however, I knew not whether he was but a mere gallant, at heart constant to his interest and Miss Aston, but who diverted himself with misleading ladies by pretty conceits and modish compliments on their persons and parts. I was eager to know more, but I repressed my curiosity, lest it should hurry me into investigation with a precipitance that would prove destructive to my schemes. Yet the discoveries I had made put me to han-

dling my natural weapons with greater security in their efficacy. 'Twas plain he was enamoured of his own person, and that Miss Aston's blindness render'd his vanity restless and discontented. It was also plain his conceit rendered him quick to relish flattery, which was a food he was not to be surfeited on. But I could not yet tell whether his passion for Miss Aston were true or counterfeit: if it had an existence, whether it was so deep as to defy the most subtile wiles, the most artful designs, a rival love might array against it; or, if counterfeit, whether self-interest might not keep him constant to dissimulation.

'Twas a long time before he came to the library. Much speculation had plunged me into abstraction, and I knew not he was come (for the door opened on noiseless hinges, and the thick carpet subdued the footfalls to silence) until I heard his voice at my ear, whispering "that the sculptor of the Cleopatra would have wrought a greater perfection of posture and shape, had he seen me thus seated in unconscious tranquil elegance."

I rose from my chair, for this was a *tête-à-tête* discretion forbad me to prolong, as I feared the

entrance of my lady, or Dr. Aston, or a maid or footman. (Servants are quick judges of dangerous matters, and are as little scrupulous in their espials as they are in the truth of their avowals.)

"It would be wiser, sir," I said, "that we should waste no time in civilities, but come at once to the matter you have in your mind. I should be undone were my Lady Ringwood to discover me alone with you; for 'tis an old fanciful creature, who would quickly set us all by the ears."

"I'll not detain you a minute," says he; "but sure you would not be so cruel as to drive me from the contemplation of the most beautiful object in this room full of beauties?"

"It is for both our sakes', sir, I advise celerity."

"Then, madam, let me briefly ask if it is beyond your power to grant me a longer interview at some other time, when we can talk without danger of being broken in on?"

I paused; though my feelings would have been quick to appoint him a meeting, my discretion warned me that a woman's favours, when too readily granted, lose half the relish that recom-

mends them. He, meanwhile, surveyed me attentively.

"Sir," I answered, "I know not whether I should not be ill-advised in meeting you alone. You are to consider that your troth is plighted, and that any engagement I may enter into with you must be empty of satisfaction to us both."

"'Tis of Dolly I would speak," says he, quickly.

"And I would have you to know, sir," I continued, "that I am young and inexperienced, and that if my heart should betray me—," here I paused, and hung my head, whilst I tapped the carpet with my foot.

"Sure," he said, half to himself, "there is a beauty that at every change seems to reach a higher ground of perfection. Oh, madam, that air of confusion becomes you mightily!"

I remained standing before him, quite still, with my hands clasped and my head hung, yet not so far, as that presently, without altering my posture, I might softly raise my eyes, and timidly watch him.

Presently he proceeded : "If your heart should betray you it would be serving me; and you would not condemn for a traitor that which would

give me pleasure and gratify my hopes? Will you grant my entreaty?"

"Where should I meet you, sir?"

"Meet me at the corner by Piccadilly. Lest we should be seen when you encounter me, we will make no salutation; but I will walk on, and you will follow, until we get under the trees in the Park, where we shall find a seat, and few or no intruders to gall us with inspection."

As he spoke Miss Aston's bell rung.

"Will you be there?" he cried, taking my hand.

"When?" I inquired.

"To-morrow," says he, "at four o'clock."

I waited a little before I answer'd; then, averting my face, I said, "I will be there," and broke from him with an air of pretty confusion. But to give you the truth, I fear'd a second summons from Miss Aston; and though it would have been more politick to dally with his wishes, I was eager to cut short the interview lest we should be surprized by a servant to tell me I was wanted. As I mounted the stairs, I heard Mr. Bracebridge open the house door, and stealthily close it after.



CHAPTER VII.

*In which will be found matter that even a beau
might meditate with advantage.*

I AM quite prepared that the reader (if he be ingenuous and a lover of morality) should discover in my conduct at this period something particularly odious and mean. It would be beneath me to be my own apologist as well as my own memorialist: I find the matter, let others find the excuse. Yet I would have the reader know that if I don't attempt to justify my behaviour, 'tis not because I have no excuses to offer, but because I do not choose to believe I stand in need of extenuation. By whom shall I be impeached? before what judge shall I be arraigned? I had my fortune to make; and like many others, who, because they make no confession of the past, are awarded all the honours that are commonly given to virtue and probity, I was not to be poorly diverted from endeavouring my own good, by the

admission of sentiment to interrupt my schemes. I make no doubt but my severest judge will be the woman who, had she been situated as I was, would have acted with even less scrupulosity than I. I take my soul to witness, I would not blame her! There was (for me) much necessity for art; there was no room for conscience; there was needed a cautious discipline of the passions; the mechanick powers were to be carefully looked to; the understanding was to be sharpened by the ejection of romance; much lopping, and pruning, and grafting, and planting, and weeding, was needful. I prythee, do me the justice to admire my ingeniousness. I multiplied my auxiliaries and imparted a careful training; yet the whole was made pitiful and sneaking; for after all said and done, *the end was small*. But had the ambition been *vast and boundless*, lud! my grave and pious criticks, would you not have stared in amazed admiration, have become my obedient, humble slaves, and celebrated me as the first of virtuous females and a mirrour of wisdom and excellence? Such merit can be spied in great things greatly done; such meanness in small things smally miscarried; though, forsooth, more

genius and more principle be exerted in the small things than in the great.

Methinks we live in a narrow and foolish world; of which the inhabitants think to deceive themselves and each other, by giving fine names to despicable qualities: for is it not a world in which wealth is call'd virtue, and pedigree call'd honour, and misfortune call'd vice, and knavery call'd wisdom? A world in which wisdom is to be known only by its rags, and roguery by its laced coat? I would scorn to apologise to such a world. When I know its claims to be my judge, I'll attempt my justification; but until I discover better pretensions than those my destiny hath forced me to examine, I'll e'en hold my tongue. Sure a thief cannot be concerned by the opinion of a thief!

'Twas a kind of fatality that it should pour heavily with rain the next day, by which my appointment was rendered impossible. I looked out upon the sullen sky and swollen kennels with impatient eyes and a restless longing to be with Mr. Bracebridge in the Park; but the heavens grew blacker as the day passed, and the rain increased its copious torrents as the hour of our *appointment* drew near.

But there was no use fretting. Another day must do as well. I was pretty sure Mr. Bracebridge would not relinquish me; and expected he would call that night and take occasion to offer another meeting.

I was in attendance on Miss Aston throughout the day. My Lady Ringwood too sought the diversion of our company, and (to me) made the time lag yet more heavily on his wings of lead by her incessant chatter. I particularly remember that at the very time I should have been with Mr. Bracebridge in the Park, Miss Aston and I conversing in a low tone, my lady got up and desired I would push her chair to the sofa, that she might take part in our discourse.

Whether it was the wet weather, or a depression that was settled on her spirits, Miss Aston look'd more pale and jaded than she was used to appear; and I could not help taking notice of a certain tone of melancholy, as well in the musick of her voice, as in the matter of her sentences.

My lady being now close to us, Miss Aston made an effort ('twas visibly done) to look and speak more cheerfully; but though my lady's eyes

were old, they were still keen, and no doubt her love for her grand-daughter imparted additional sharpness ; as indeed the accuracy of the reports of our organs depends more on the instincts that digest them than the natural qualities that direct them.

“ Why, Dolly,” says she presently, “ what’s given thee that drooping air ? Have you a headache, child ? ”

“ No, no,” answers Miss Aston ; “ I am very well ; ’tis the weather, I suppose. I’ll not deny my spirits are less sprightly than they were this morning.”

“ Well,” cries my lady, “ ’tis strange the weather should affect folks as if they were no better than plants. Sure if our faculties are regulated by our soul, ’tis impossible to suppose that which is immortal to be affected by such material influences as rain and sunshine.”

“ It is the soul, perhaps, that sympathises with the body,” said I ; “ and ’tis sure the body is vastly influenced by externals.”

“ Tut, child ! ” cries my lady ; “ would you have the human body a barometer ? ”

“ ’Tis no better,” said I.

"I warrant you, then, mine is better," answers she; "but to be sure you may call the modern body what you will. I'll not gainsay you. In my day, there were men and women lived in Britain. But now it's populated by a race of puppets, whom you may call barometers or what you will. I'll not gainsay you, child; I'll not gainsay you. Eh?"

"I didn't speak, my lady."

"Lookee, Dolly," says Lady Ringwood, "you must clear up your face, or I doubt but Mr. Bracebridge will be thinking you are dying away for love; and if I was you, I'd take care my husband hadn't a better notion of himself than it was my pleasure he should have. Mr. Bracebridge is not wanting in vanity."

"He has reason, granny," says Miss Aston quietly.

"'Tis a pity if you let him know you think that," continued my lady. "Men's pretensions are always too great; and it is the business of every woman of understanding to beat them down. 'Twas my pleasure to let Sir Ralph Ringwood know I had but a mean opinion of his parts and person; he was so little used to

praise from me, that when I condescended to approve his behaviour, 'twas worth a journey to witness his delight."

"He died young, did he not, my lady?" I asked.

"He did, child," she returned, with a sudden sharp fierceness; "but he was a pattern husband, eminent for his piety, humility, and obedience. He was a gay, frolicksome spark on town when I first knew him; but he soon sober'd down to my taste. Oh, 'tis many years gone now since we met! . . . to think on what has happened since then! . . . 'tis no longer the same world!" Here she heaved a deep sigh; then looking stedfastly on Miss Aston, said: "Dolly, if ever you desire to be happy, be sure that the man you mean to marry loves you. And if you wish to preserve his love, always let your conduct be justified in his sight, that it may breed his respect. And be true to yourself, and never yield to his wantonness. Let your virtue be rigorous in its care of itself, but let it not be inexorable in its judgments on your husband; for severity closes the gates of redemption; and there hath been many a heart broken by too

fierce and regardless a practice of virtue. If he be a man, he will err; and if you be a woman, you will forgive. Tenderness, my dear, is a beautiful nymph, whose business it is to stand on the threshold of a home, with open arms, to woo back the wanton fugitive. Love will always find room for her, for she is the chief attendant on love. Yes, yes! I would have more marriages for love and less for gain. I would have more contented and humble homes, and less gaudy and ostentatious tombs; I would have less luxury and less epitaphs. I say, my dear, better a loving kiss than a broken heart. I have seen much kissing amid poverty, but I have seen many broken hearts amid wealth. I'm an old woman, Miss Boothby," says she, turning to me; "I was born in the year 1689. William of Nassau was on the throne then; Mr. Dryden was living; and the great Mr. Addison was only seventeen years old. I have seen many changes, and watch'd the rise and decay of fashions, and mark'd the growth of babes to manhood, and seen many die; and I have met with much evil and much good; and know, for I have lived to see, that Time is just, and unravels the web of things,

and rights the wronged, and sets the world straight, like one that hath been long absent from his home, but presently returns to tidy and put all things in order. I am privileg'd to speak, for I know; and 'tis just I should know, for 'see the penalty I pay for my knowledge, my dear."

Saying which, she stretch'd out her hand, which trembled in that ague which old age brings; and push'd her face close to mine that I might witness for myself the marks of decay which were very visible, especially in the eyes, which seemed hung over with a mist, like that which sometimes creeps upon the land when the evening is come.

There was much thought on Miss Aston's face as my lady spoke, and I will not deny but I was sensibly moved by her discourse, for her old age gave a very pathetick meaning to her language; and though what she had spoke was but a string of familiar truths, yet methought they look'd new, with a certain calm melancholy which their delivery by so old a woman imparted.

"I will take your lessons to heart, grandmother," says Miss Aston; "though I would not have you question Mr. Bracebridge's love. And sure he will never vex me with wantonness;

though should he, I doubt not he would be forgiven so often as he should offend."

"Nay, Dolly," says my lady, "you cannot rehearse the future; 'tis a gloom in which you know not what shapes are stirring, what deeds are hatching, what joys are shining or tears raining. 'Tis fitter you should contrive your schemes, form your own resolutions, and walk by their light with the discretion you are mistress over. For it hath been given to no man to say 'I will do such a thing,' or 'Anon, I'll act in such wise,' or 'To-morrow there will fall out such a thing.' God has made us blind that we may need His guidance."

"Yet, madam," said I, "may not a man so plan his future, that if he live to travel over it, he will find his own prepared roads to journey on, and achieve his end without being perplexed by the thousand obstructions that encumber the way in an unfamiliar land?"

"He may," she answer'd; "but let him beware lest too much such planning breeds confidence in his own wisdom. Therein lies the danger. Had we less pride we should have more religion. We are pious in proportion as we distrust our own

power. Methinks the truly religious man is he that hath an humble and touching faith in the wisdom, the greatness, and the power of his Maker."

I could follow no logic in my lady's argument; but how should so old a woman be able to reason without suffering sentiment to push her logic from its purpose? I answer'd that "humility was doubtless the spring of piety," and then went to the window to look upon the day. 'Twas gloomy indeed: the gale roared, and dash'd the rain against the houses; and the chairmen, as they passed, seemed to be at much pains to keep their legs. It was no doubt partly the sullen heavens that occasioned our melancholy, yet our conversation might have been more sprightly; and betwixt Miss Aston and me it would have been, but it was my lady who saddened it.

Presently returning to my seat, I found Miss Aston speaking of Mr. Bracebridge as one whom she considered too good for this world.

My lady answer'd tenderly, that she believed Mr. Bracebridge to be a very honest young man, but that she would advise Dolly not to carry too high an opinion of his merits lest she should suffer

disappointment ; for, says she, "there is a moral I have drawn from my long acquaintance with the world, which no old creature can easily miss, and it is this : that we can never form so mean an opinion of a man but that, if we will give him time, he will vindicate our judgment. I speak generally, my dear. I would not have you undervalue Mr. Bracebridge ; 'tis proper you should hold a lofty opinion of the man you are to marry ; but disappointment in love is very bitter, and for my part I consider a man will appear as well on a pedestal as on a pillar."

"Well," said I, "if I was in love, I would wish rather to think too well of my man than too ill. Life, madam, after all, is but made up of illusions ; and I would have every one push the enjoyment of his dreams to the utmost whilst they last."

"Why," cries my lady, "if you would reduce life to a puppet-show 'tis as well you should grin or weep through your part as a spectator whilst the entertainment is before you. But take my advice, madam, and regard life as a more serious matter than a Bartlemy droll!"

She spoke with asperity, and turn'd her face

from me, clouded with a sudden air of distrust, which was bred no doubt by my disagreement. Eager to conciliate her, I answered, "that she mistook me. I was well aware of the seriousness of life ; indeed, who should know it better ? for I was poor, and had tasted the bitter bread of poverty and sorrow early ; and my lady was to know there is no such sullen, horrid instructor as want."

"Poor dear !" says Miss Aston, with her sweet smile, stretching out her hand for me to clasp. "'Tis hard for a female to want, for if she has man's fortitude she has not man's opportunities. But indeed, dear, you shall not want again, if it is in my power to succour you."

I kissed her hand, and replied "that I desired my lady would not think I treated life but seriously. When I spoke of its illusions, 'twas a poetick view I took ; and not indeed without reason has life been called a dream. But I knew as well as my lady——"

"Ay, ay," says she, "but the poets speak of its illusions only in reference to death. Life they compare to a dream, and death to an awakening from it. 'Tis a conceit not inapt nor inelegant ; but the poetick world is not the world we live

in, and though poetry may compare until it confounds, and illustrate until it destroys, methinks stern fact never budes an inch; and 'tis fact I would have you think on when you talk of life."

"I do think on fact, madam," said I; "but sure you would not prohibit us the soft solace of fancy! 'Tis pleasant after the hot white road, to turn to the refreshing green pasture. The heart will ache with perpetual truth; and to ease it, we must have recourse to fiction, which yet shall not be falsehood."

"Why, my dear," she replied, "if you put it in that way, I agree with you."

She was proceeding, when the door opened, and Mr. Bracebridge was announced. He made a polite bow to my lady and me, and stepping over to Miss Aston, took a seat next her. I drew to the window, whilst my lady, not desiring to be so near the lovers, left her chair and presently went from the room.

It was wonderful to mark the change that came over Miss Aston when her lover was with her. He broke up her abstraction, like the sunshine dissipates the gloom; all her face grew gay in his presence; her mouth was embellish'd with

smiles, and she went from the extreme of tranquil dejection to that of sprightliness and vivacity.

I did not look towards Mr. Bracebridge for some time ; but when our eyes met he gave me a pleasant agreeable smile, and pointed to the floor with his finger, by which I judged he wished me to meet him in the library. But in reply, I shook my head, and nodded towards my lady's chair, and afterwards to the door, the meaning of which he was quick to perceive. During this dumb-show, he continued his conversation with Miss Aston, modulating his voice so artfully, and so skilfully keeping her ignorant of his proceedings, that I could very plainly see I had found my match in duplicity, and that the nature of Mr. Bracebridge was very, *very* remote from the good opinion entertain'd of it by his mistress.

What does he then do, but taking a gold pencil from his pocket and a piece of a letter, he falls a scribbling, yet never suspending his conversation; and having written, he jerk'd the paper dexterously from him, nodding at me to gather it. I did so, and drawing again to the window read it as is here writ :—

"DEAREST MADAM,—I will not deny but that the passion you have inspired me with has made me to heartily curse the rain that prevented our meeting. But sure the weather will yield to a lover's wishes; and being fine to-morrow, you will meet me at the hour and place appointed for to-day. 'Foregad, my dear, 'tis hard to see you in your ravishing beauty and yet not address you; but my fancy is busy, and I am with you in imagination, which for the present must satisfy the eager passion of

"Your obedient humble admirer."

'Twas a declaration of love, and coming unexpectedly, filled me with an inward perturbation which yet did not my countenance betray; but that he might judge of my pleasure, I gave him a languishing look, and taking a pencil from a silver standish, writ these words:—

"I cannot come to-morrow as there is to be company at dinner, Mr. Boothby among 'em; but I will be with you the day following."

And this distich coming into my head—

"In vain lost Eloisa weeps and prays,
Her heart still dictates and her hand obeys"—

I added it; and contrived so to cast the paper that he might take it by stooping without rising. Having read it, he pressed it to his lips, and gave me such a look and such a smile, as filled me with a kind of tumultuous ecstasy. Then, lest my emotions should be too powerful to dissemble, I rose and softly left the room, meeting his kindling eyes as I passed, and taking care to swim by him with that graceful carriage which I inherited from my mamma, who had it in perfection.





CHAPTER VIII.

In which the reader will encounter some distinguish'd characters.

THE company Dr. Aston assembled at his table was commonly so good and distinguish'd, that it demanded the presence of a very eminent character indeed to lift the guests of one day above those of another. Yet on this day was there to be witnessed some excitement in Dr. Aston's behaviour; for it was to be his to entertain at his table the most celebrated character of his age, the great moralist, the laborious lexicographer, the sagacious critick, and the elegant poet. The reader will not want me to name Dr. Samuel Johnson.

I own I could not but share in some degree the excitement of Miss Aston, whose admiration of the doctor was at once liberal and discriminative, and free from that bigotry which deformed

the admiration or frenzied the prejudices of the great man's friends and foes. For me, I had heard Mr. Boothby speak of him as a being of colossal genius. I had read newspapers overflowing with vehement praise of his parts and diligence. The name of Samuel Johnson was the most familiar to me of all the names in English literature. I was particularly pleas'd with this opportunity to hear and see him; for I doubted not 'twould be regarded as an honour in years when Johnson should be no more, to have met and convers'd with the author of "Rasselas" and "The Vanity of Human Wishes."

There were also invited Mrs. Montagu, distinguish'd as the founder of the Blue Stocking Club; Mr. Thrale, the opulent brewer, and his lady; and Mr. William Whitehead, the poet laureate; besides Sir Charles Bracebridge, his son, and Mr. Boothby. Dr. Burney and Mr. Wilkes had also been ask'd, but had declined, the one through illness, the other through a previous engagement.

I had little choice of gowns for my attire, but I made shift, by a judicious selection from my narrow wardrobe, to exhibit my person to a very

great advantage. I was sensible that one's carriage plays as distinguished a part in the figure one makes at assemblies, as one's costume; and though perhaps I had been better satisfied with a more ostentatious display of dress, I had little to fear on the score of elegance of air and easiness of behaviour.

Below, the library door was thrown open, and the apartment was brilliantly lighted with candles. The room wore an oriental air with its white statues, its ravishing sculptures, its velvet drapey, and sombre antiquities judiciously disposed. In the drawing-room, the reflected lights from the rich sconces and sumptuous candelabras, filled the air with a soft voluptuous radiance which sobered down the complexion with becoming hues, and gave greater whiteness to the snow of my bosom. Modesty shall not forbid me to speak the truth; so that I may truly say that never before nor since did my beauty shine with such effect; for my eyes, which were dark, were kindled with the light of expectation and the pride of anticipated conquest. The vermilion upon my cheeks imparted a brilliant whiteness to my ears and neck, whilst on my lips sat

the demeure, pretty smile, which, being often practised, was always at my command.

Dr. Aston reposed near his daughter in all the airy splendour of a suit of apricot-coloured silk, lined with satin. Miss Aston was dressed in a gown of white satin, flower'd with silver ; her hair was adorn'd with a gauze head-dress, worn turban-wise, with a heron's feather ; her neck was bare, but she wore earrings, inset with large diamonds, which flashed like running tears to each movement. But sure the comicallest sight in the world was my lady, who was habited in a little hoop, and rich silk damask gown with large flowers, which methinks must have belonged to her grandmother, and which was so stiff, it would have stood alone. Her hair was dressed high, and decorated with huge feathers, which nodded above her head as threatening to overset her. Her little dried hands were armoured with rings, and she wore pink shoes with high heels, like those that were the mode at the commencement of the last reign.

The company presently assembled, excepting Dr. Johnson, for whose arrival expectation among some of us was on tiptoe. I was well pleased

with Mrs. Thrale, who had saucy eyes and a pert address, of which the conceit was sunk by a certain smart artlessness. Mr. Thrale, who was just recovered from a severe illness, looked dull and dogged. Mrs. Montagu, though her large Roman nose gave her face a masculine air, was soft and winning in her manner. She seated herself by Miss Aston on her entrance, and conversed with her in a voice and with an address that made me perceive her sympathies were very womanly. Mr. Whitehead was a thin, pensive man, with a calm countenance, but an irresolute mouth, and eyes that seem'd to avoid the contact of others, from a humility which sure his elegant poetry did not render needful. But it was plain his character wanted that salt of pride which gives flavour to one's manners and speech. When I mentioned my impression of Mr. Whitehead afterwards, to Miss Aston, she answered "that she believ'd it was due to a scurrilous attack made upon the poet's reputation by Churchill, the friend of Mr. Wilkes, by which Mr. Whitehead lost so much in the publick favour that Mr. Garrick declined to produce his comedies."

I could not but take an interest in Sir Charles

Bracebridge, who entered with his son. He was a short, plethorick man, with a red countenance. He had an awkward air, as of one who has passed more of his life in the hunting-field than in the company of ladies. He wore his cauliflower wig too large, which gave him an odd appearance; but he had a small, piercing black eye, and a large heavy hand, which he carried clench'd. There was no look in him of his son: whence I inferr'd Mr. Bracebridge ow'd his beauty to his mother.

I was particularly pleased to see that Mr. Boothby was uncommonly well-dressed; and between ourselves, I protest he look'd as fine a gentleman as any one in the room. On entering, he kissed me on the forehead, and then went over to Mr. Bracebridge, with whom he fell into a conversation.

Meanwhile, where was Dr. Johnson? 'Twas half-an-hour after dinner time, and yet he was not come. We, who eagerly awaited him, were fearful lest he should disappoint us. Presently, Dr. Aston, whispering Mrs. Thræle, left the room, and after a short absence return'd laughing.

"Why," he cried, "Dr. Johnson is below in the

library, and there he has been for the last half hour. He has pulled half of my books from the shelves, and I found him seated amid a pile of my handsomest volumes, putting them close to his nose, and throwing them from him with contemptuous expressions !”

“We are used to that at Streatham,” cries Mrs. Thrale with a loud merry laugh ; “are we not, my master ?” (this to Mr. Thrale.) “He treats a handsome bound book as he would a laced beau : if the fellow has something in him he will endure his company until that *something* is exhausted ; but if he be empty of understanding, he’ll toss him from him with as sound a banging as ever the wretch is likely to suffer.”

After this, we trooped down to dinner. On entering the dining-room I look’d for Dr. Johnson, and sure enough, there he was : seated at the top of the table, next Dr. Aston’s chair. He got up as we flock’d in, and stood with his burly form swaying, until we were seated ; then resumed his place.

He was a strange, terrible looking man, quite unlike the picture I had form’d of him. He had a massive rugged face, full of seams and scars ;

lack-lustre eyes ; a capacious mouth, which he contorted by whistlings and gurglings ; great thick arms, which he could not keep still ; and a vast person that roll'd about like one who stands upon a tossing ship. He looked sternly around the table. I met his gaze, and quailed before it. But some fish being put before him, he fell to it with fearful eagerness, like a starving man, cramming great portions of it into his mouth, and chewing with such energy that the veins about his forehead stood out like ropes. 'Twas a disgusting sight to see him eat. He tore, he did not cut, his meat ; he mixed strange messes in his plate of vinegar, butter-sauce, and claret ; and some veal being set before him, what does he do but calls aloud for a lemon and brown sugar, with which he plentifully anointed the slices, and then fell to eating them with a noisy, snorting vehemence that bereft me of appetite.

Mrs. Thrale, who sat next him, seem'd used to this behaviour ; but once after watching him, I met Mrs. Montagu's eyes,—she lightly shrugg'd her shoulders, with a visibly satyrick smile. Poor thing ! she was the very essence of refinement and breeding, and the shock to her

sensibilities by the spectacle of Dr. Johnson eating, must, to judge from my own sensations, have been peculiarly trying.

Mr. Bracebridge sat over against me, and next Miss Aston. On either side of me sat Mr. Whitehead and Sir Charles Bracebridge. My Lady Ringwood was at the bottom of the table, and on either side of her Mr. Boothby and Mr. Thrale. You may be sure I was careful not to look toward Mr. Bracebridge, and he was equally careful not to see me. For not only did Sir Charles intently watch the behaviour of his son, but I could see Dr. Aston from time to time glance towards them, not stedfastly, but with such a quick, discerning look as he knew how to direct.

Dr. Johnson was pretty silent during the early part of the dinner, and but for Mrs. Thrale, little would have been spoke. She did not appear to mind the sage's presence, but rattled on gaily, now with Dr. Aston, now with her master (as she styled her husband), and now with Mr. Whitehead. But these preferred to play the part of listeners rather than speakers, from awe of Dr. Johnson's reputation, which was indeed con-

siderable enough to depress greater minds into silence. But by-and-by, Dr. Aston observing Dr. Johnson to be drinking water, ventured to recommend him some old Burgundy, which Johnson declined.

“Oh, Dr. Aston,” says Mrs. Thrale, “you must know that Dr. Johnson practises more penances than a Capucin friar. He begins with a medical, and runs on into a moral consideration; and what between his fear for his soul and his fear for his health, he denies himself near all the pleasures of life.”

“Madam,” answered Dr. Johnson, “if you would stop that little whirligig tongue of yours, you would supply me with a pleasure that would compensate me the loss of the rest.”

“Pray, sir,” asked Dr. Aston, “what objection have you to wine?”

“A sound one, sir,” answered Dr. Johnson; “it disagrees with me.”

“And yet, sir,” says Mrs. Thrale, “you will eat heartily of a veal pie stuff’d with plumbs,—a mess that would poison an ostrich.”

“Madam,” he answered, “you have to accept life on the conditions under which it is offer’d. I

can eat veal pie and plumbs without injury to my health, for when my hunger is appeased, I eat no more. But of wine, madam, I am never to know when I have had enough. One glass creates the want of another, and a second demands the support of a third. Besides, madam, I have no confidence in my powers of resistance. There is a heedless vivacity in wine that is above the reach of judgment. Come, Dr. Aston, let us pledge one another in water, and put in for a hundred."

"Well," said Sir Charles Bracebridge, "for my part, I had rather die at fifty a wine-drinker than live to a hundred on water."

"And, sir, you will have all the fools in the country to agree with you," answer'd Johnson; then, after a pause, he said sternly,—“If you must think at all, sir, why will you not think wisely?”

"I have only your word, sir, that I do not think wisely," said Sir Charles, surlily.

"Sir," said Dr. Johnson, "you are an old man and should therefore be a sensible man. Consider, sir, if you talk so wildly, what are the young people to think who are listening to you? Why,

sir, I had rather be an *American* than emit such folly."

Sir Charles mutter'd something beneath his breath, Mr. Boothby laughed out, and my lady uttered a succession of shrill squeaks, like a peal of giggles. But the rest were somewhat disconcerted by this rudeness, and I observed that Mrs. Thrale engaged the doctor in a conversation, either to restore his temper or to restrain his further impertinence.

The talk then became general. Mr. Whitehead conversed with me; but I was eager to listen to Dr. Johnson, whose distance from me I lamented, as the voices about me render'd his language difficult to catch. Nevertheless I succeeded in overhearing certain of his remarks, which I will set down in the order they were spoken; for which I doubt not my reader will be oblig'd:—

Dr. Aston said he was no believer in ghosts. Dr. Johnson answered: "Sir, I would have you careful how you reject a belief which the greater number of mankind, in all ages, have very readily entertained. Besides, sir, you are to consider that the testimony of the Scriptures is with the believer in supernatural existences. But the real

way to put it is thus:—Suppose, sir, you should be obliged to lodge in a house that was said to be haunted by ghosts : how would you sleep ?”

“Soundly enough, sir,” answer’d Dr. Aston.

“No, sir ; you would not sleep soundly. You mistake. You exaggerate your fortitude. You might repose in comparative security until you heard a noise ; but, sir, when you heard that noise, the probability is you would lie in a cold sweat, in an agony of apprehension. Sir, you would summon your philosophy in vain ; reason would fruitlessly rehearse its objections ; fear would master you.”

“Madam,” I heard him say to Mrs. Thrale, “it is impossible for a rational being to enjoy himself at a ridotto or assembly ; but, madam, it is possible there may arise such a fortuitous combination of painless conditions as will enable him to pass the evening with few objections.”

He mentioned that his friend, James Boswell, Esq., of Auchinleck, had projected a tour with him to the North. “Of Scotland,” he said, “I know nothing ; but of Scotchmen my mind is sufficiently oppressed with the knowledge, and I desire to know no more. Yet, sir, for the ac-

quisition of knowledge I would face the blasts of sterility and endure the inconveniences of penury."

He ridiculed a love of the country. "Depend upon it," he said, "a man that professes an attachment for the country is either a fool or a hypocrite. No, sir; the country is well enough for animals that bite the grass; but a rational, a *thinking*, being demands the intellectual enlightenment of a city. There is Beauclerck's friend, Lord Langtyre; he is never weary of expatiating on the beauty of his quincunx, the melody of his fountains, the lazy gloom of his grottos, the smoothness of his verdant meads, the majesty of his swelling hills, and the drowsy darkness of his sinking vales. But Lord Langtyre is always in London; sir, Lord Langtyre is a hypocrite. Then there is Lawson. Lawson, sir, is a man who insults the understanding by a vapid declamation against London. But if you examine Lawson's mind, you will find it the mind of an ox or a sheep; for, if an ox could talk, it would talk like Lawson. Depend upon it, sir, a man's intellect may be proportioned by his adherence to the metropolis. Sir, if I had a son whose

intellectual inferiority determined in favour of a country residence, I would avenge the city by matching him with such another wife as Mrs. Thrale!" leering upon her with an ogreish look, and puffing, panting, and shaking his head like a man possessed with the devil.

He said in reply to a question from Mr. Boothby: "Garrick, sir, is a companionable man; his conversation is good entertainment; he has sprightly parts and judgment to improve them. To be sure, his vocation is beneath the dignity of a rational being; for no man with pretensions to wisdom could make faces by the hour to an assembly of fops and courtezans. But, sir, what Garrick does, he does well; and that is his merit."

Mr. Boothby asked him whether he thought Mr. Garrick superior to Mr. Barry. "Yes, sir; in degree, but not in kind: as an ouran-outang is superior to an ape, being more scarce; but they are both monkeys."

"A fiddler, madam," he said to Mrs. Thrale, "is the lowest species of human being;—stay [smiling] I am willing that a dancing-master should be lowest. But it is hard to choose be-

tween them : hard to pronounce which shall be the lees and which shall be the dregs."

I had made up my mind to address the great man when an opportunity should serve, and at this cried out :—

"Sure, sir, you cannot but esteem the vehicles by which the embellishments of a polite education are imparted?"

The company stared to hear me speak : and Mrs. Thrale gave me a roguish look of encouragement. Dr. Johnson leered on me a short time before he spoke, and then exclaimed, laughing and rolling about in his chair, "When beauty becomes the advocate of folly, morality is dumb."

"But what have you to answer to the young lady, sir?" asked Mrs. Thrale.

"The young lady is very flatteringly answered," replied Dr. Aston laughing; "morality in her presence has pronounced itself dumb."

Mrs. Thrale tittered at the equivoque, and repeated some lines in Latin; at which Dr. Johnson cried "Very well, madam; very well indeed;" and addressing himself to me, "Do you know Latin, my dear?" says he. I replied that I was but imperfectly acquainted with that

language. "Then I will give you the English of Mrs. Thrale's quotation," said he :—

"The sage thus vanquish'd by the lovely fair,
With languid eyes avow'd a softer care ;
Confest the bliss of Cupid's thrilling laws,
And lost his heart together with his cause !"

The ladies now withdrew to the drawing-room. I protest I was greatly mortified I was not able to hear more of Dr. Johnson's conversation ; for though there was something very repelling in his face contorted by grimaces, his burly form animated by a thousand odd motions, and his loud voice, yet what I had heard of his speech pleas'd me vastly, and I was particularly gratified by the almost elegant air he employed whilst reciting the quatrain.

Whilst we waited for the gentlemen, we were diverted by a sprightly conversation between Mrs. Thrale and Mrs. Montagu. Mrs. Thrale was much to my liking. She was not pretty, but there was an air of flippant genius in her countenance that was mightily taking. Her eyes were fine ; but she was deeply rouged, which gave an hollowness over her cheekbones, and establish'd a look of age that was above her years.

Both she and Mrs. Montagu quoted freely in Latin and Greek ; and I greatly envied the superiority of their parts and understanding.

But I could see my Lady Ringwood did not relish Mrs. Thrale's company. There was too much sharpness of vivacity to entertain the languid comprehension of old age ; for Mrs. Thrale's conversation corruscated with wit : 'twas like throwing pinches of gunpowder behind the grate. And indeed in the mere powers of conversation Mrs. Montagu was no match for her, though it was plain her parts were more solid and her knowledge more extensive. But she had not the same art of exhibiting her resources. When she said a good thing she seemed to labour ; and though what she brought from her mind was massy bullion, yet Mrs. Thrale's tinsel suggested greater affluence of thought, because it offered a wider extent of glittering surface.

The gentlemen were not long in following the ladies. My eye selected my man at once amid the group that enter'd the room. Oh, I vow I had never seen so pretty a fellow as Mr. Bracebridge looked, as he paused at the door, casting his eyes around the room. The

wine he had drunk had flushed his cheeks with a becoming red, painted a pleasing gay smile on his handsome mouth, and kindled an unusual lustre in his eyes, which shone when they took the light from the sconces, like the diamonds in Miss Aston's ears. How elegant his carriage as he advanc'd! how easy and how noble his posture as he paus'd! with what a stately gaze he swept the room! Those who remember Mr. Barry as *Romeo*, the silent impassioned eloquence of his gestures, the tender beauties of his countenance, the engaging ease of his movements, will yet not readily bring Mr. Bracebridge before them; for Mr. Barry would rather furnish out hints for Mr. Bracebridge's perfections, than give them that form they demanded ere their full beauties could be acknowledged.

Sir Charles, perceiving Miss Aston alone, went to her, and got into conversation, with an air that plainly showed he considered her already his son's wife. Dr. Johnson rolled heavily towards some sculptures, which he inspected by bringing his face close to the marble, and was presently joined by Mrs. Thrale and Mr. Whitehead. Mr. Bracebridge took a chair next

Mrs. Montagu, and Mr. Boothby came over to me.

"Well, Tishy," says he, "I han't had a chance of speaking with you before now. How do you do here?"

"Very well," said I. "How are you?"

"Always troubled with my old complaint—want of the ready," he answer'd. "D'ye know you look a charmer to-night, wench? I doubt but you'll make your fortune here, if you stick to't long enough."

"Where do you lodge now?" I said.

"Why, I have left Little Queen Street, and am in an upper room in the Haymarket. Confusion burst me! but I'd sell my honour for such a house as this! eh? What d'ye say, child? Are not here some fine things? Why, the value of a third of the contents of the room below would set me up as a fine gentleman for life."

"How do you live?"

"How do I live? Why sometimes on my coat; and when that's gone, on my credit; and when that's gone, on my wit. Faith, wench, I've done thee a good turn in setting thee up here. Why you're a lady—ay, make your fortune what

you like,—you're a lady *now*: season'd with quality, daintied up with sweet victuals. Ah! 'tis a fine contrast, that a daughter should go to a couch of silk, whilst her father sneaks like a footpad to a two-pair chamber and a bedstiddle!"

"'Tis not my fault," said I.

"I don't blame ye. But look you here, child; between you and me, if 'tis by me my fortune's broke, *you* may have the mending of it. It is said good wine sharpens wit; and as I sat at dinner, I laid a rare scheme, wench, a rare scheme. Ifacks! you shall have the hatching of it. Come to me to-morrow night. I lodge over against the *Apollo*. You'll not mistake it. Will you come?"

I reflected that I was to meet with Mr. Bracebridge in the afternoon, and that this invitation from Mr. Boothby would supply me with a good excuse to be absent. I deliberated; then said I would be with him.

"Well resolved!" he cried. "Ah, wench, if there's little money in my purse, there's plenty of wit in my head; and I promise you such a design as shall make you swear by your father's genius. And hark in your ear, Lætitia, if you

can bring half a guinea with you I shall be obliged. 'Twill get me a bottle which I doubt not the wheels in my head will want to set 'em working. You'll be there?"

"You may depend upon me," said I.

He winked on me with an uncommon sly shrewdness, and went over to Mr. Thrale, who was examining an elegant carved dial over the fireplace. Dr. Aston just then entering, and finding his guests disposed in couples, came over to me who was now alone. As he took the seat Mr. Boothby had quitted, I met my father's eyes: they gleam'd with such a keen intelligence as almost seemed to whisper the nature of his scheme. I laughed inwardly at the dexterity with which I had deciphered his meaning. But of this more in another page.

"Well, Miss Boothby," says Dr. Aston, by way of opening up a conversation, "how do you like Dr. Johnson?"

"Very well indeed, sir," said I.

"He has strong good sense, but commonly his conversation would be a dish almost too hotly season'd for my palate to relish. Besides, madam, he is not a fair foe in argument; for he comes

upon 'the field armed with a dozen weapons, whilst his opponent meets him with a single rapier. Should his pistol miss fire, he'll level a sledge-hammer at you; and should that fail he'll discharge a blunderbuss full in your face."

"But, sir, I should say that Dr. Johnson is a man that never quits one without leaving behind something worth gathering and hoarding. His strong form puts me in mind of a rude old keep, where is to be found a rich deposit of precious treasures."

"True, madam; or of a grotesque Asian idol filled with valuable gems."

"Miss Aston looks well to-night, sir. I am always glad when I witness her cheerfulness."

"Yes, madam; she looks very well to-night; but this you must know comes from her having been some time in the company of Mr. Bracebridge. 'Tis surprising how he influences her. I wish we practisers of the healing art knew more of such psychologick mysteries; our Pharmacopœia would make but a sorry show were we to hit on more remedies for the mind."

"I don't doubt, sir," says I, with a laugh, "there would be less sickness if there was less medicine."

“Yes,” he answer’d, “I am with you there. What we need among us physicians is more knowledge of *mind*,—to make the mind, in short, our primary, and not our secondary, concern. For life is greatly dependent on the spirits; and ’tis my experience to have witnessed the life of an irregular and diseased conformation prolonged by almost no other power than a cheerful heart, a keen intellectual appetite, and a resolution to admit no thoughts but such as are sprightly and diverting. I suppose, madam, you have yet found no opportunity to test the elasticity of Mr. Bracebridge’s pride, and judge how far his melancholy joke of honour is like to carry him?”

“Why, sir, to tell you the truth, I had a short conversation with him on the subject the other day.”

“Well, madam?”

“Well, sir, I put it to him with all the delicacy at my command, how unmajestick and ungracious love was to be rendered by stiffening it too much with the hoops of honour. I could see he did not relish the allusion by a stranger to his affairs, and he took me up with a sudden

haughtiness, by bidding me tell him if I thought a man of honour could consent to live upon his wife. I replied that I consider'd honour but as the constable of the understanding, that its only business was to restrain it from wrong, but that it had no call to interfere where no evil was meditated. I was cautious not to carry the conversation too far, lest it might hurt my design; but we talked long enough for me to discern that Mr. Bracebridge is a man of stubborn resolution and haughty prejudices."

"By heavens!" cries Dr. Aston, "he is enough to enrage a saint! Do you know, Miss Boothby, I have a mind to waylay this priggish honour of his, and wipe the foppish obstruction out of my daughter's road—by what mode, think ye?"

"I cannot guess, sir," answered I.

"Why," then says he, stooping his head, and bringing his mouth pretty close to my ear (and he was in this posture when I again perceived Mr. Boothby's eyes stedfastly directed on us), "you must know Sir Charles is as eager to push this matter forward as I am; he for his son, and I for my daughter. Now, madam, I am thinking of getting Sir Charles to take half my

"daughter's fortune would be still preserved has come to my hands as we may expect, and shall reserve it to give it to his son on the condition that he is to marry my Miss Aston before her marriage, and that should Mr. Bracebridge prove well as I suspect my daughter's fortune may be secured to her."

"That is most ingenious, dear sir," said I.

"Yes," said he, sitting erect and smiling on me, "for he will never know but that the money is his father's, and when Sir Charles has made this proposal of settlement, it is impossible Mr. Bracebridge can refuse any longer to wed: for his sole objection—I mean the objection of his honour—will be rid."

"You must be careful, sir," said I, "that he does not come to hear of this. He's of a nature to shy the moment he's brought to guess he's to be harnessed."

"He shall not know it," he answer'd. "The secret will be yours, Sir Charles's, and mine. I beg you will not make Miss Aston acquainted with my scheme."

"Sir, I shall take a particular care to be reserved."

"For," continued he, "'twould be as little pleasing to her as it is to me to know that her lover could not be brought to her but by a stratagem. But such is my love for Dolly, Miss Boothby, that methinks I could condescend to any mean artifice to procure her happiness; and 'tis sure she will never know any other happiness than Mr. Bracebridge's love."

"I beg, sir," said I, "that you'll command me if I can be of any use in the forwarding of your wishes."

"I am obliged to you, madam," he replied. "I am very sensible of your goodness, and shall endeavour to repay you for the uncommon interest you manifest in my daughter, by serving you in such a useful fashion as you may command or opportunity may suggest." Then rising, he made me a bow, and went to join Mrs. Montagu, whom Mr. Bracebridge had left for Miss Aston, whilst Sir Charles was engaged with my Lady Ringwood.

"Well," thought I, "sure fortune means to be kind; for here am I thanked for an interest I do not take, and promised rewards for a service I have not performed!" 'Tis easily guessed that

what I had told Dr. Aston of my conversation with Mr. Bracebridge was a mere invention ; for all that ever passed between the pretty fellow and me is set down. Indeed, I now began to see that affairs were about to grow complicate, and that every move of mine must be executed with extreme caution. Yet I strictly resolved, as you may believe, to make all the various interests by which I was surrounded subservient to my own purposes ; mine own stratagems should build me my fortune, and the interests of others should be the cement by which the whole should be securely fastened.

The evening being now advanced, the company separated, Dr. Johnson leaving with Mr. and Mrs. Thrale, and Mr. Whitehead following with Mrs. Montagu. I could see Mr. Bracebridge would have given much to have spoke with me ; but I took care to keep him at a safe distance by replying with significant eyes to his languishing glances. But on leaving he came to bid me farewell, and whilst he stooped over my hand, whispered,—

“I hope you have not forgot our meeting to-morrow ?”

“I have not forgot it more than you, sir,” I replied; and he went away with a pleased countenance. Mr. Boothby also reminded me of my engagement to meet him, and I repeated my promise to be at the Haymarket at half an hour after seven.



CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Bracebridge and Miss Boothby in the Park.

THE next morning being fine, Miss Aston went for an airing in the chariot; I accompanied her, and whilst we drove, I procured her leave to visit Mr. Boothby that afternoon and evening. Indeed she begged I would never be at the trouble of asking her permission to be absent; "for," says she, "I wish you to consider yourself free to act as you please. Our house is always your home whilst you choose to remain; and I would have you to know that it is not because you are engaged to me at a salary you are to lose your privileges as a lady and your freedom as a woman."

"Indeed you are very good to me, madam," I answer'd; "and I only wish I could justify my reception of your bountiful kindness by the sense that I deserv'd it."

And truly I did; and I'll not deny that whilst I look'd on her, I was smote with a pang at the

deceit I was practising, and wondered keenly that Mr. Bracebridge could find it in him to act the hypocrite to so truthful and beautiful a character. Had I been a man, and had she loved me as she loved Mr. Bracebridge, 'tis certain I could not have done her an injury; her sweet, fond helplessness would have defeated my evil promptings; her pretty fidelity would have put to flight any sneaking resolutions of ill; I could not have beheld her blindness and given her pain. Even as a woman I was sorry fate should have brought me into antagonism with so helpless a creature. Had she been haughty and passionate; had she been robust and healthful; nay, had she but had the use of her sight, I could have sapped the hope and joy of her life without a moment's remorse. But here she was, sweet and cordial to me, and I working to break her heart! Well, when the weakness passed, I was glad to be rid on't; for had it lingered, I had broke with Mr. Bracebridge. But I was presently reanimated by a sense of my position. I perceived the insecurity of my hold on life unless I could get a footing; besides, his beauty came to urge me with a passion not easy to repel.

To accommodate me, Miss Aston desired the dinner to be served by two: for I had told her I was to be with my sister at four o'clock. My Lady Raymond was very garrulous at the meal; but Miss Aston was thoughtful. Yet it was ever the character of her sweetness to triumph over the moods of her melancholy; and no one that addressed her, but was rewarded by the prettiest, tenderest smile that ever made a kind of music of a blind countenance.

My lady had been particularly pleased with Dr. Johnson; indeed she couldn't get him out of her head.

"Sure he's the greatest man our age has produced!" she cried. "Did you hear him put down Sir Charles? Eh, but I like such spirit."

"Twas almost rudeness," said I.

"No, no," says she; "truth is never rude to people of understanding. To be sure you misses like a polished air. You'd have a bow with every smirk, a grimace with every 'how-d'ye.' Nothing but the grand style goes down among you. But give *me* a man of spirit—a sturdy, contemptuous, hearty understanding, that knows how to run a-muck with cant, and tilt with,

not bark at, every folly it encounters. I know your notion of wisdom : 'tis a thing dressed in a bag-wig and sword, with fine ruffles and diamond buckles,—a mincing, strutting, scented prig, eh ? What you'd call among ye a love of a thing ; which you could pet, and tumble, and tickle, and find diversion in its fine airs and French bows, eh ?”

Miss Aston laughed, and said, “ she wished she could have seen Dr. Johnson, as she did not doubt but he was the very contrary to my lady's aversion.”

“ Madam,” said I, “ Dr. Johnson is a big man, with a bushy wig, large hands and feet, a face full of scars and seams, who eats like a cormorant, splashes his clothes with his food, snores when he is silent like the winding up of a Dutch-clock, yet who talks so nobly, thinks so sagaciously, expresses himself so perspicaciously, that he in an eminent degree illustrates the triumph of mind over matter, and forces you to lose the grotesque oddness of his figure and manners in the blaze of his wit and knowledge. For me he might have been the dainty fopling my lady just now described, so little did I heed his appearance when once he let loose his conversation.”

“ Miss Boothby speaks the truth, my dear,” said my lady graciously ; “ and oh, Dolly ! he is a Tory and a Jacobite, and a High Churchman, and everything a man of parts should be. And his hatred of cant ! I could have thrown my arms about his neck and kissed him for his views on education.”

“ What were they ? ” asked Miss Aston.

“ They were mine ! they were mine ! ” she cried, triumphantly. “ He said that educating the lower orders in the hope of improving them was like fattening a sheep in the hope it will become a bull. Impart the alphabet to them, said he, that they may know how to read their Bibles ; but to educate them in the belief you will be improving their condition, is monstrous rubbish ; for those that have merit will rise of their own accord : as among savage nations there will be always some who will distinguish themselves above their fellows, and take the lead. If we educate the lower orders, we shall be cramming them with notions of their own importance ; they will shirk menial labour, and there will come a dearth of servants. He said he was not surprised to hear that there was a set of noisy creatures

going about the country, insisting upon the value of education for the poor ; they were Whigs, and 'tis the nature of Whigs to go wrong. Besides they were empty blockheads who wanted parts to distinguish themselves by honourable and legitimate endeavours ; and so, like the fly in the fable, sat upon the wheel of a popular idea, and tried to make mankind believe 'twas they raised the dust. As to the notions they talked about, they were too contemptible to be controverted ; and if they floated on the surface just now, it was because they were obedient to the laws of lightness and rottenness. But by-and-by they would decay, and vanish, for nothing stupid can last ; though it is possible for stupidity to enjoy an ephemeral popularity, since the wise will not condescend to attack, and the rest are too foolish to know what is good from what is bad."

Here my lady drew a long breath, for she had delivered this with rapid volubility ; then she added, " But indeed I do but poor justice to his ideas ; 'twas impossible to hear him, and not to feel that he was like the sage in his own elegant fable of *Rasselas*, who, *when he speaks attention watches his lips, and when he reasons conviction closes his periods.*"

"'Tis a pity that you are not both young," cries Miss Aston, merrily, "for sure such admiration would end in marriage."

"Why, as to that," answers my lady, "between you and me, I'd as lief have Dr. Johnson for a husband as the sprightliest gallant in the three kingdoms."

At this both Miss Aston and I fell to laughing so heartily that my lady grew angry.

"Pray," says she, sternly, "where's the merriment? I thank my stars I am too wise to be a married fool at fourscore; though was you to be told the number of marriages that have taken place among the aged, you'd laugh on the other side of your mouth. But it is the privilege of youth to grin at old age, and it is for such diversion that old people are endured; tho' such indecent merriment hath cost a man his ears in my day, when 'twas the foolish fashion to respect the aged. But let that pass. I'm sorry my understanding won't suffer me to entertain you with my marriage; and I hope, Miss Boothby, when you are my age, you'll have as much wisdom; and so your servant."

Saying this, she got up and went from the

room, leaving Miss Aston much concerned to think that she should have been the occasion of her temper. But I had other matters to think of; and as the time was drawing near for my meeting, I begged Miss Aston's leave to withdraw, and went to my bedroom.

So far as I have gone in these memoirs I have very diligently laboured to show you my nature in its true light; and I trust I have so far perfected my efforts as to enable you to see that mine was a character not very readily disturbed by apprehension, disconcerted by failure, or oppressed by novelty. It will not seem surprising, therefore, that I should have contemplated the approaching interview with Mr. Bracebridge without emotion. To be sure he had confessed his passion for me in the letter he had writ in the drawing-room, and I was prepared to be received by him with the salutations of a gallant and the ardour of a lover. But I was very resolute to restrain my thoughts and behaviour before him until my beauty should have ravished from him a fuller declaration of his intentions. 'Twas natural all my wishes should urge me towards him. Of one crime—poverty—he was indeed guilty;

but his want of fortune was compensated, not only by his breeding and person, but by the title I doubted not he would enter upon when his father should die. To be *her ladyship*,—to be *my Lady Bracebridge*,—was, methought, to pluck a very choice fruit from the tree of Fortune. As to a want of estate, I doubted not I should thrive as well as other ladies of quality who had no more than I, but who were accomplished in the modish arts of gaming, tricking, and wheedling; and who from cards and beaux contrived to extract a revenue sufficiently large to enable them to make a figure in the polite world. But, on the other hand, I was supposed to regard Mr. Bracebridge as a man of honour, to which title he appeared very eager to lay claim. I was therefore to inquire whether 'twas possible for a man of honour to break with a woman to whom his troth was plighted, and with whom stratagems were being devised to hasten his union. Such were the thoughts that slipped through my mind as I made myself ready for the meeting. But significant as they were, to be plain, they did not prevent me from rehearsing my simpers and practising my languish-

ing looks in the mirrour; nor did they in any degree qualify the ardour with which I decorated my person and equipped myself for conquest.

"And sure," I cried, as I contemplated myself in the glass, "he cannot but allow the superiority of my charms over 'Miss Aston's. My countenance wants indeed her sweetness, but then it has a fire to which hers is a stranger; my voice may lack the flute-like softness of hers, but then it has an energy which must recommend it to a man of spirit. 'Tis true I have no fortune; but fortune with him seems to weigh but little."

Thus reasoning, I stepped downstairs and entered the street. 'Twas a soft, mild day; the heavens were clear as crystal, and the sun hardly suffered a cloud to obscure his brightness. A gentle gale fanned my cheek; the pavements were thronged with passengers; and when I was got to the Oxford Road, it was with difficulty I could cross through the numerous chariots and coaches which swept by in all varieties of colour, filled with elegant ladies.

Coming presently to that part of Piccadilly where I was to meet my man, I looked earnestly about, and presently spied him some distance away,

making signs to attract my notice. I bowed my head in recognition of his presence ; and, perceiving him to walk toward the Park, followed him. Ere long, he entered a shady avenue, where but few persons could be seen walking among the trees ; and turning suddenly about, came to me with a polite, humble bow, and, taking my hand, kissed it.

“Madam,” says he, “I am very sensible of your obliging conduct in meeting me : ’tis a pleasure to which I have eagerly looked forward ; though I was prepared for disappointment, since it is a happiness too great to be confidently expected.”

“Sir,” I answered, “I may hope that my punctuality will entitle me to your good opinion, and that your behaviour will justify that confidence in your breeding which my presence here proves I possess.”

To this he made no reply but a bow ; and presently coming to a seat, pleasantly situate beneath the foliage of a larch, he inquired if it would be my pleasure to sit ? We seated ourselves ; but I observed he was careful to take his place at a respectful distance from me. This

behaviour bred a confidence which set me at my ease; nor could I refrain from casting admiring glances at his dress, which was indeed elegant, consisting of a fine laced waistcoat of blue paduasoy, and his coat, a pearl-coloured fine cloth, with gold buttons, and lined with white silk.

"How does Miss Aston this morning?" he asked.

"She is very well," I replied; "though was she to know of our meeting, I doubt if her heart would be light."

"And pray, madam," asked he, "what do you think of my conduct in breaking with a lady under the mask of still preserving my passion for her?"

"Sir," I said, "I dare say you are as skilful in placing a construction upon your behaviour as myself. What should I know of the secret motives that regulate your conduct?"

"Shall I risk your esteem if I am plain with you?"

"I hope, sir, you will not give occasion."

"Then, madam, suffer me to say that the passion I entertain for you leaves me no option but to play the hypocrite. Though I was possessed

“The winning face and imitative manners of Mr. Fane would be hopeless in me to attempt disguise. No, Miss Boothby: I had no sooner cast my eyes upon you, than love took possession of my heart, and as it was a genuine love, so it assured me that the former passion that had resided there was an impostor.”

I hung my head, whilst I answered, “that it was past belief I should so quickly inspire a love powerful enough to determine a passion that had long enjoyed its sway without a rival.”

“But do not the poets,” he cried, “sing that true love is ever prompt: that the love that deliberates is weak: that genuine love owns no laws of thought but swiftly vaults over the loftiest prejudices, and like a dart buries itself so deep, as to defy ejection? Madam, I could rather wish such an argument were yours than mine, for my own passion I know, but of yours I am ignorant.” Then, drawing a little nearer, he exclaimed earnestly, trying to catch sight of my face which I partly averted, “What am I to believe, dearest? What am I to hope?”

I answered softly, “That it would be foolish to deny that so sprightly an understanding, so

amiable an exterior, and so handsome a person must be agreeable to me."

"And will you believe me when I swear that I am ravished by the delicacy of your beauty, which you must know to be of too exquisite a kind not to set honour at defiance, and turn a man crazy with resolution to act as it shall command?"

"But how, sir, would you have me reconcile your new passion with the promise you lie under to Miss Aston?"

"Will you believe," he cried with great earnestness, "when I protest I have no passion for Miss Aston?"

"I am surprised. Your behaviour to her would lead to no such inference."

"No; and it is my policy it should not. You are not wanting in sagacity; and you must have penetrated the motive of my delay, and judged that with true passion there would exist no such paltry considerations as I have opposed to our union."

"I imputed your delay to your nice honour. I believed, with Dr. Aston, that your love of independence placed you above the prompting of passion."

He smiled, and then as quickly grew grave again.

"It was not so indeed, madam. I never truly loved Miss Aston. How, indeed, should I? I allow her beauty; I adore her amiability; but her blindness—her blindness!"

"But you must have been sensible of the objection of her blindness when you plighted your troth?"

"True; but I was goaded on into a proposal of marriage. I sought her hand, madam, with no willing heart. Sir Charles, my father, is a man of very violent passion and vehement resolutions. He saw our fortune wanted mending, and as he was too old himself to set about the repairs, determined I should be the architect. Before I engaged myself with Miss Aston, he discussed the matter with her father, whom he found very eager to procure me for a son-in-law, for Dr. Aston saw his daughter's affections were set on me, and being studious of her welfare, conceived very properly that no better husband could be provided than the husband of her choice. When my father opened his views, I swore it was impossible I could gratify them. I begged him to

acquaint me how he supposed I could ever entertain a serious passion for a blind girl? He replied angrily that I was not to think on her but on her fortune. I bade him know it was not in my nature to act so meanly as to cloak indifference with the mock garb of love; and that unless a genuine passion inspired me, I could not offer for her hand. To this objection he contented himself at first by opposing a few surly sarcasms; but finding me stubborn, he flew into a violent rage, swore with many imprecations that unless I consented to engage myself with Miss Aston he would deprive me of the narrow allowance he makes me, and leave me to shift for myself."

"I can readily believe your father is a hard man; he has a passionate quick manner, and suggests a spirit of a kind not calmly to brook the delay of opposition."

"That's about the truth, Miss Boothby. But to proceed: I had something to lose—my father nothing. To have been deprived of his support would have been to plunge me into destitution: he on the other hand would have been a gainer, to the value of my income. I therefore resolved to agree to an engagement with Miss Aston on

these terms :—That I should not marry her until I was in a fair way of earning an independence. I pleaded my honour on behalf of this design, at which he ironically laughed ; but, growing enraged, I swore that I would only engage myself to Miss Aston on my own terms ; and that if he did not like them he might carry out his threat. After a debate, which was pushed with much warmth on both sides, he finding me to remain stubborn, nay, even to threat my refusal to concern myself in any way with Miss Aston, yielded the point. Dr. Aston being made acquainted with my resolution, saw that it exhibited a scrupulosity of honour, against which it was idle to protest, and consented to an engagement. But, between you and me, madam, his daughter's partiality for me, had left him only *Hobson's Choice*. He perceived I was become in a measure necessary to her ; and so made the best of what he was disposed to dislike, by a prompt and cheerful acquiescence."

" But sure, Mr. Bracebridge, when you engaged yourself to Miss Aston, you was prepared to fulfil your obligation by marriage ?"

" Why, hark you, to be candid, I did *not* mean

to marry her. I hoped or believed that she would grow weary of a long courtship, and that some quarrel would arise to supply an excuse to break with her. But as time went by, and I discovered that I was not advancing in my profession,—that should my father withhold my allowance I should be without the means of support—in short, when I weighed my indifference towards her in the scale with the advantages that would result from my union, I, finding myself attracted by no other woman, fell to considering my relations with her more seriously, and ended at last by regarding her as a lady that should one day be my wife. Now, you are doubtless wondering why, after resolving to marry her, I did not marry her off-hand. This I might easily have done. Dr. Aston was eager for the wedding; Sir Charles was equally anxious; my Lady Ringwood, who was sensible of Miss Aston's passion, would be glad to witness its gratification; and for Dolly herself, I knew that I had but to make the request, and the parson would be sought without more ado. But so often as I resolved to marry, so often I recoiled from the sacrifice. I knew I had no love for her, and I was disordered by a thousand appre-

hensions for the future. So I remained shilly-shallying, yet never discovering the emotions by which I was harassed; for I still skulk'd behind the stratagem of honour I had contrived to delay my marriage, so there was not one of them but believed I was true to that principle of integrity which I had sworn prohibited me from owing my support to a woman's bounty."

Here he paused, and looked on me with a tender regard; and presently he took my hand, and pressed it to his lips. This I suffered. I was sensible now of a passion for the pretty fellow, and for my life could not prevent me sighing a little, though I was cautious when I returned his glances to veil my eyes, that he might not see the emotion that lighted them up.

"And now," says he softly, "I am about to make a confession which, tho' I delay it with my lips, my eyes must speedily proclaim. Until I met you, dearest, I was prepared to marry Miss Aston so soon as I could master my indifference sufficiently to leave my inclination free to act; but no sooner did I see you, than the affection I had laboured to raise for Dolly died, and a great passion for your numberless beauties

seized me. I knew my doom was fixed—that I had met the charmer whose slave I was henceforth to be; and though I struggled against the new-born feeling, I was soon obliged to confess the conquest of your beauty, and offer you my love in thought as I now offer it on my knees.”

So speaking, he knelt and covered my hand with kisses. I looked shyly around, fearing he should be seen in that posture. Happily the scene was vacant.

I'll not deny that a powerful emotion of pleasure brought the blood to my cheeks and kindled my eyes with fire on witnessing this handsome, this elegant creature on his knee at my feet. I felt then the pride that no queen can feel, whose pomp of state and circumstance of royalty lend not half the significance to the courtier who makes obeisance on the throne-steps, that the simple state of my beauty imparted to the gallant in his posture of homage.

Presently he rose, and took a seat at my side, then bending till his lips touched my ear, he whispered,—

“May I hope, sweet, that I have your love?”

“Sir,” I answered tenderly, “your confession of

love has filled me with gratitude and joy ; my spirits tremble beneath the load of obligation your pretty avowal hath laid upon them. But it is impossible I could give you an answer until I am made to know that your love for me is honourable, and that your esteem of my virtue is only equalled by your opinion of my person."

"Can my Lætitia doubt that I design to marry her?" he cried.

"'Tis impossible," I answered, trembling with a pretty confusion, "that you intend me so great an honour."

"Nay," he said, "sure the honour is rather mine—that is, when you have said you love me."

I meditated a while before I spoke, during which he watched me with impatient solicitude.

"Your candour," I said, "demands my plainness. Since you have acquainted me with the honourable nature of your love, 'tis but just I should give you hope."

"Bid me feel more than hope!" he cried with passionate emphasis. "Bid me know you love me! 'Tis impossible you should plumb the depth of my passion; but you cannot so distrust me

as to delay my desire to know your mind, that you may take time to more narrowly inspect mine! Is it so hard, dearest, to speak those words—*I love you?* ”

“It is not, sir,” I replied; “and if I seek to dissemble my sentiments, it is from concern for you: for you have had but a short time to find your account in love. ’Twas but the other day we met for the first time; and, in spite of the poets, you are to know that the wisest love, like the sweetest fruit, needs the longest time to ripen. Therefore, sir, I would advise you to pause, and consider well your own feelings, before you demand a confession of mine.”

“Dearest,” he said, “be persuaded I love you with an ardour beyond the power of speech to compass, though the apostolick gift of tongues should descend to give me inspiration.”

“Then,” said I, “I believe you.”

“And you love me?” he cried.

“Yes, sir; I love you.”

At this, he took me in his arms, and showered upon me a thousand caresses. I resisted his eagerness at first, thinking it becoming in me to do so; but wishing to fan into a furnace the

flame that my beauty had lighted, I presently yielded myself more entirely to him, that he might feed his love when I should be gone with remembrance of the kisses he had ravished. But I cried presently, "Sir, you will surfeit yourself with embraces : for love's appetite, though keen, is quick to pall. Since we know each other's minds, let us fall now to sober conversation."

Hearing this, he released me ; but he retained my hand, nor could I prevent him from raising it to his lips. Anon he says,—

"It is proper now, as you say, we should converse soberly. And first let me acquaint you with what is uppermost in my mind :—this matter must be kept a profound secret between us."

"Plainly it must."

"For, you are to consider my fortune as yet is not secured. Tho' I am diligent, I am earning nothing by my toil ; and therefore what I would have you remember is, should my father know that I had broke with Miss Aston, he would dismiss me without a groat to feed myself withal."

"Besides, Mr. Bracebridge," said I,—

"Prythee, my dearest, call me Jackey," says he ;
"'tis so I am called by my friends."

“ Besides, Mr. Jackey—”

“ Nay ; not Mr. Jackey, but Jackey.”

“ Why then, Jackey,” said I, smiling, “ you are also to remember that should Dr. Aston get to know I had usurped his daughter’s place in your affection, he would turn me from his house ; and I am free to confess that I should have no refuge, for my father is poor and unable to support me.”

He paused awhile and eyed me, methought, with a very close and strange regard, then brightening—

“ No, no,” says he ; “ ’tis very clear we must keep our secret. Therefore say you nothing of our love—no, not even to your father, lest he should impart it to others, and so it reach Dr. Aston. Meanwhile let matters go on in the way we are used to see them. Sir Charles is no longer a young man, and has now reached the age at which his father died ; so that any hour may admit us to the enjoyment of his fortune (such as it is) and his title. Or should he hold out, I will apply myself more diligently to my profession, from which I may presently draw a revenue not beneath our wants. Meanwhile we will consider ourselves betrothed . . .”

He looked into my eyes; I answered him with a smile. Presently he continued, "But to obviate all suspicion it is plain I must continue my behaviour as a lover to Miss Aston; for should I manifest any coolness toward her, there might come a quarrel which would deprive me of the pleasure of seeing you at her house. Besides, her affections are so woven about me, that any coolness might breed a distemper which would compel her departure from London. Your services would then be no longer required; and (since you have confessed it) you are not in a position to be without the support of others."

"That is certain."

"I set the hazard of our position before you," says he, "that my behaviour to Miss Aston may not excite your suspicion of double-dealing."

"I shan't doubt you. You have sought my love, and you'd not have done so was you not sincere; for my recommendations are weak,—I am without fortune, without friends, and am wanting in all those pretensions which recommend a female to a gentleman of condition."

"But you have beauty," says he, "which is a dowry that many would be glad to forfeit all

their best qualifications for, whether of fortune or mind."

I could see the evening was now drawing on by the shadows that thickened the air, and desired he would tell me the hour. He drew forth his watch, and informed me 'twas a quarter after six. On this I rose to go. I judged our interview had been long enough, and that if I wished to cherish his passion, I must be studious not to give him too much of my company. He desired before I quitted him, that I would appoint him another meeting; but I said we could arrange that at Wimpole Street. He then tenderly embraced me, and so I tripped away.





CHAPTER X.

Miss Boothby visits her papa in the Haymarket.

I LEFT Mr. Bracebridge with my spirits much fluttered. I was indeed now privileged to cherish the fancies my imagination might chuse to prompt; for he had pronounced upon our future, and we were betrothed. Yet so often as Hope shook her wings, so often did Reason check the premeditated flight. That Mr. Bracebridge was vastly taken with my person I made no doubt; and I also believed, judging from the heat and tenderness of his address, that had his position allowed, he would have made me his wife at once.

But I was not so sure his passion would last. I could not but recall Miss Aston's remark that the flower that blows early, dies early; and tho' I was very willing to admit the power of love that is fed by beauty, yet did I conceive that

should Mr. Bracebridge encounter a woman of equal charms with myself, he would have no more scruple in breaking with me, than he had in breaking with Miss Aston.

My appointment with Mr. Boothby was not until half an hour after seven; so that I had leisure to collect my thoughts and compose my countenance, both of which were not a little disordered. I had partly guessed why Mr. Boothby wanted me; but as I could not make sure, I suppressed all speculation, being satisfied that I was possessed of an imagination vigorous enough for any exigency.

I took my ease along Piccadilly, contemplating with various emotions the sights and shows of the streets, which were varied enough to divert a mind less speculative than mine. I particularly amused myself with conjecturing how many of the fine ladies I saw were the architects of their own fortune. I did not doubt but that half of those my eyes rested on owed their positions, their chariots and silks, to artifices which, were they written down in good, strong English, would sink their characters to a greater depth of meanness than even Misanthropy could

conceive. Indeed my observation made me bold to hope that I, who was possessed of fairer charms than the greater number of those females, had as good right as they to anticipate a glistering future.

On reaching the Haymarket, I cast my eyes around, and espied the *Apollo*, whence I was able to guess my father's lodging. 'Twas a mean, narrow house to the left, hard by the King's Theatre. I knocked, and was admitted by a wench, of whom I inquired if Mr. Boothby was within ; but before she could answer, I heard his voice calling, "Step up, step up, Tishy! Show her a light, Moll, you drab!"

I mounted, and presently reached the door of a chamber of which the interior was a cloud of smoke. Through this fog, I perceived Mr. Boothby, and in a chair fronting him, a dirty-looking beau, who, on my entrance, rose in a majestick manner, and, clapping his hand to his breast, made me a low bow.

"Come in, Tishy," says Mr. Boothby. "I hope the quality han't spoilt your taste for Virginia. This is my daughter, Mr. Fitzpatrick," (and to me,) "You must know," says he, "Mr. Fitzpatrick

is the celebrated player. It was he who played *Captain Plume* to my Lavinia's *Silvia* in the 'Recruiting Officer' at the Aungier-street Theatre in Dublin: a piece of acting which, on Mr. Fitzpatrick's part, as much excelled Mr. Elrington's performance as my Lavinia's surpassed Mrs. Woffington's."

I curtsied to Mr. Fitzpatrick, and was then seized with a violent fit of coughing, which Mr. Fitzpatrick perceiving, he stalks with a tragic air to the window, and threw it open with great solemnity of gesture. The room being presently cleared of the smoke, I was able to see Mr. Boothby, who, catching my eye, slyly winked on me, with a glance at Mr. Fitzpatrick, by which he designed to let me know Mr. Fitzpatrick was not there at his invitation.

Mr. Boothby had called Mr. Fitzpatrick the celebrated actor, but I protest 'twas the first time I had ever heard of Mr. Fitzpatrick's name. I should, however, have had no difficulty in determining his vocation, for his air was very theatrick: he coughed like one who clears his throat for a declamation; he handled his pipe as tho' it was an hanger; he had a slow laborious face which nothing

might stir, and he sat with an air of sullen solemnity, such as might become *Tamerlane* or the *King* in "Hamlet." For his dress, he wore red plush breeches, a white dimity waistcoat, a blue plush coat with metal buttons, white stockings, pumps, and pinchbeck-plate buckles which almost hid his feet.

"Well, madam," cries he presently, "do you mane to favour us to-night with your company at the 'Maid of Bath'? 'Tis the first performance, and Mr. Foote acts in it. 'Twill be worth seeing."

"We shouldn't have far to go, Tishy," says Mr. Boothby; "'tis but at the Haymarket over the way."

"I'd rather not, I'm obliged to you," I said. "I must be back at Wimpole Street before ten."

"True, I had forgot," said Mr. Boothby. "You are to know, Mr. Fitzpatrick, that Lætitia is on a visit to Dr. Aston, the famous physician."

"Indade, madam?" replied Mr. Fitzpatrick. "And may I be so bould as to ask if you ever meet Mr. Garrick at the assemblies there?"

"Why, sir," I answered, "I have not met him yet; but I know he is no stranger at Dr. Aston's table."

"By heaven, then," cries Mr. Fitzpatrick, pointing to me with his pipe, "'tis in your power to confer an inestimable benefit upon me."

"And pray how can I serve you, sir?" I asked.

He laid his pipe upon the table, got up, and stalked to within a yard of my chair. Then placing one hand on his breast, and waving the other,—

"Madam," he said, "I would not have you think I rate my theatrick genius above its deserts. No, madam; what has been observed by the poet, that

‘Modesty becomes the man of parts,
And proves his genius better than his arts,’

is beyond denial. But truth is never immodest; and therefore I am privileged to say, that were Mr. Garrick to witness my acting (unless indade his soul is more eaten up by jealousy than 'tis commonly believed), he would not lose an hour to carry me to his theatre, and advance, by assigning me some conspicuous part, those merits which I dare to claim because I know the town would eagerly recognise them."

"But, sir," said I, "if you have genius could

you not so assert it at the Haymarket, that Mr. Garrick should come to you without solicitation, and offer you employment at his theatre?"

"Why," says he, stepping backward like a courtier from his sovereign, and dropping into his chair, "I dare to say that in any other calling but the stage, my qualifications would have long since earned me the applause of the town, and secured me a distinguished name. But it nades all the power of private interest to break, ma'm, through the barriers of envy; that is why I doubt not a word in Mr. Garrick's ear from a lady of figure like yourself, would procure me a situation that would enable me at least to add a shirt to my ruffles."

"Look you, Mr. Fitzpatrick," says Mr. Boothby; "'tis as well you should be envied, for envy is the best credential of genius."

"Ay," says he; "but envy won't pay the drawer."

"Why, that's so," answered Mr. Boothby; "but I'll warrant you, since you've asked her, Tishy will not be above doing what you want. 'Tis hard a man of merit should have to *appeal* for a living. Z—ds!" cries he, turning to me, "you

don't know the great natural genius Mr. Fitzpatrick possesses. Why, he fills the stage, and 'ud fill it though Mr. Barry and Mr. Quin were on either side of him. As to Garrick, to be sure the man's a sprightly player: but I hope ye'll believe me, Fitzpatrick, when I protest I'd lay twenty guineas you'd wipe him out of sight before a polite audience in *Macbeth*."

I glanced at Mr. Fitzpatrick to note how he relished this nauseous praise, but it smacked in nowise nauseous to him. He nodded gravely with a solemn countenance, and sucked his pipe with an air of conviction that proved he for one, did not doubt Mr. Boothby's words.

"If Mr. Fitzpatrick's merits be so considerable," said I, "I should exhibit but a mean taste if I remained a stranger to them."

"I hope, madam," cries he, "you'll not delay honouring our little theatre with a call. 'Tis the privilege of genius to soar above the exigencies of Fate; and though I may be cast in a mean part (and 'tis one way Mr. Foote shows his envy of me) when you witness me acting, yet I flatter myself you will perceive certain strokes in me performance which shall aven more powerful illus-

CHAPTER IV. *Mr. Boothby.*

"I am not at all surprised that you should strut in some
little play."

"Oh no doubt, I shall be much diverted," said I.

Then Mr. Thompson rose to take his leave; and the first waiter pressed him to remain. Ere he was he had given my hand with a bow from which I imagined he would never recover himself, and then saying or rather muttering in a hoarse voice—

"This was great meat in oblivion lie,
And not forgotten in Eternity."

he stalked tragically away, waving his hand with great solemnity to Mr. Boothby.

When he was gone I fell a-laughing heartily at his pompous air and queer figure. "Sure," I cried, "you was not in earnest when you praised him above Mr. Garrick?"

"In earnest!" replied Mr. Boothby in a voice of contempt. "Not I. But he has a prodigious swallow; and if he relishes that sort of meat there can be no harm feeding him on't."

"I doubt he's not always so tickled to his taste," said I. "To judge from the voracity of his appetite he is starved for praise."

"Pooh!" answered Mr. Boothby, "all the stage-players are alike, my dear. For my part, I have little love for them."

"But pray," said I, "why should you flatter a man whose profession you dislike?"

"Why, to be plain with you, I owe Mr. Fitzpatrick half a guinea; and as I never know when he'll ask it of me, I contrive by my flattery to supply him with too sensitive a conscience to make his demand. By the way, my dear, have you a stray piece or two about you? for I protest I have not tasted food to-day; the only cook in London who'd give me credit left his tavern yesterday."

I pulled out a guinea, which I threw on the table. His lean face did, indeed, make me uneasy; and his thin hands and sunken cheeks exhibited the issue of more than a single day's fasting. His countenance brightened when he caught sight of the piece; and catching it up, he called, in a strong eager voice, for Molly.

"I'facks!" cries he, "but I'll make a night on't. Confusion burst me! if it wasn't for this my laced coat would have been in buckle to-night. Here," cries he to the wench, who was now come, "troop

over to the *Apollo*, and bid 'em send me a roast chicken and a bottle of sack, with a cup of burnt wine sweetened and spiced, for the lady here ; and look ye, hussey ! see they lose no time, or, by the lord Harry, I'll have to kill and cook you as a stay for my stomach !”

The wench ran hastily out. I then inquired of Mr. Boothby what was the business he had in his mind.

“Why,” he answered, “’tis a most important business—nothing less than the making of your fortune. But faith, child, sure you would not be so cruel as to have me discourse on an empty stomach ? Know you not that a bottle and a hearty meal make a better contriver of schemes than the wisest cabinet the king hath ever assembled ? No, no ; wait till I have supped, then you shall see what it is to have a cunning father whose concern for your interest is always above his own.”

So I had to repress my curiosity, which was, however, no very great trial. Until his supper came we conversed upon his affairs ; and I drew that he was even poorer than when he lived in Little Queen Street ; that he had made himself

too well-known at the gaming-houses to carry on his system of plundering ignorant young sparks; that his pen had almost failed him; and that, indeed, he hardly knew how he lived.

"Why," continued he, "the very suit I appeared in at Dr. Aston's was lent me by a retired player who knew me when thy mother performed at the Haymarket; and next day, being hungry, without a groat in my pocket, what must I do but clap the suit in pawn, and left it to lie in buckle till the lender grew clamorous to have it returned. Z—ds! I had put myself in a pretty pickle, for I hadn't a stiver left of the pawn-money, and knew not how to redeem the clothes. But 'twas necessity gave birth to invention; and finding my friend had changed his polite tone of requesting to the hoarser notes of threats, I stepped round to a tavern where I was well known, accompanied by Joe Estcourt, and begged the loan of a silver tankard, protesting I was expecting a nobleman to sup with me, and would not appear in so mean a condition as not to give him silver to drink from. Joe stood my friend, swore that I was a man of the nicest honour, and with many vehement asseverations protested that if the tankard wasn't

returned, he'd replace it by a gold one. So getting the tankard, I clapped it under my coat, and stepping round to the pawnbroker, left it with him in the room of the suit, which I sent to the owner. But I'm still in a mess; for here's Joe threatened with the Gate-House by the tavern-keeper if the tankard is not speedily restored; for it seems he's got to hear of my condition, and regards Joe as a man of substance who'll bleed more readily if he's attacked."

"And how long," said I, "is this course of life to last?"

"Curse me!" he cried, stedfastly regarding me, "if thou'rt altered by a shadow since thou wast a wench no higher than my knee. How can you ask me such a question with a countenance as unmoved as yon nab? I doubt but it would be all the same to you, if one night you should stumble over my lean and distempered carcase in the kennel! I always swore you had no drop of your mother's blood in your veins. Dang it, Tishy, where's thy humanity?"

This question was opportunely answered by the entrance of the maid with the supper, which being set before him, he fell to with a heartiness he could

not or would not dissemble. I sipped my cup of spiced wine, feigning an inattention to his behaviour, tho' I did in secret narrowly watch him. My observation gave me clearly to know that his manners were more debauched, than when we lived together; though his mode of eating, his hearty mastication, his eager drinking, his method of wiping his mouth on his cuff, might have appeared more gross to me by contrast with the behaviour I was used to witness at Dr. Aston's table.

His supper being finished, he fell to counting the pieces the wench had brought him, as if calculating the wants they would supply, and with a grin of satisfaction hid them in his pocket. After which, filling his pipe, he drew his chair from the table, and, fixing his eyes upon me, began to smoke. Presently he says,—

“Tho' I believe you despise me, I must own your company's done me good.”

“Well, sir,” said I, “perhaps you will now acquaint me with your scheme for making my fortune?”

“Lookee, my dear,” says he, “to be plain with you, I'll just say my scheme is as much for me as for you.”

I answered with an unmoved countenance, "That I could not expect he should forget himself in obliging me."

"And have I not a good excuse to be selfish?" he cried, with a sudden passion. "I tell thee, wench, 'tis hard for an old man to be a poor man. I swear but for your guinea I had starved to-morrow for want of a groat to buy me a crust. Ay, ay! 'tis all very well for you to slip back to your dainty bed and your master's plenty; but give me leave to tell you that the only qualm your beggar knows is that of hunger. Conscience sits easy enough on a hearty meal; but Want is without virtue; and Famine, child, is the most immoral wretch that flaunts the streets."

I listened to him with a steady face, and observing him to pause, begged he would acquaint me with what he had on his mind, for the time of my departure was now coming rapidly.

"Why then," said he, "to be brief, 'tis my notion Dr. Aston may be very readily brought to entertain a passion for you. You must know there are two periods in a man's life in which, by an artful woman, he is easily to be procured in

marriage : first, when he is a young man, of an age when the temper is hot, the soul generous, the affections warm, and the heart impressionable; secondly, when he is an old man, of an age when conceit is strong within him, and when his judgment is so impaired by time as to render him not difficult to persuade that he is loved only for his person and face. Now I don't say that Dr. Aston is in this imbecile decade; but I'd lay a hundred against ten that with your parts, figure, and understanding, you'd speedily make him soft enough to knead to the form you wish."

As I had partly guessed this was his *wonderful* scheme, I received his hints with a composed countenance, on which he called out,—

"Why, hussey! have you been artful enough to strike out this design before?"

"No," I replied; "it has not entered my head."

"Then you think it great? It has amazed you? That steady face is but the usual mask of your surprise?"

"I'll allow," said I, "'tis ingenious."

"And will you act on this hint?" he cried with great eagerness.

"I must take time to consider. For how are you to know this scheme of yours will fit the man it's intended for? You have not taken his measure. You are a stranger to his understanding." I was proceeding, when he interrupted me by exclaiming,—

"It's impossible I can mistake ; for Dr. Aston (though I doubt not he possesses parts superior to most men) is yet but a man, as vulnerable to flattery as fallibility can make him or the best of us. Consider, besides, the advantages nature has bless'd you with. You have but to employ them with such skill as your cunning and instinct may suggest, to achieve almost any purpose you may have a mind to. For beauty, Tishy, is a power 'tis not in man's nature to resist. Doth not history teach us that it has turn'd heroes from the loftiest enterprises, and started monarchs on schemes of rapine and conquest? 'Tis a talisman that hath chang'd milk to gall, and gall to honey. It hath subdued power, and raised meanness to high places ; it hath debauched virtue, corrupted piety, and with skilful handling will always possess the influence to deal with mankind as though a god or a dæmon

were among 'em—to bid 'em go or stay—to set 'em capering or weeping—to make 'em daring or timorous—and to force into motion all the agencies by which fortune, place, and condition are governed.”

This speech he delivered with great gravity; and then solemnly sucked his pipe, that I might have time to digest the wisdom he had imparted. But, to conceal nothing, I was too busy with my thoughts to give him all my attention; for though I could not but admire his hint, 'twas too late now for me to profit from it. I was betrothed to Mr. Bracebridge; and tho' Dr. Aston's fortune would have pleased me vastly, I was not sure I would not be better satisfied with having for a husband the prettiest fellow in the world, who would one day give me a title, and raise me to a position to which as Dr. Aston's wife I might have no pretensions. But as it was necessary I should dissemble my passion for Mr. Bracebridge, methought it would be rendering *assurance doubly sure* if I pretended to acquiesce in Mr. Boothby's scheme. For I judged Mr. Bracebridge and I stood far more in danger of discovery from Mr. Boothby than from the others,

for his knowledge of vice rendered him quick to scent mischief. Observing him to regard me inquiringly, I said,—

“I think well of your project, and shall hope its reward will not be beyond me.”

“Pugh!” cried he. “You have but to make up your mind for success, and success will come. Besides child,—pause a moment and reflect on my misery. Cast your eyes around this apartment, regard my hungry face and soiled clothes, consider my humbleness of air which is the mould in which Life shapes anew the wretches she has broke, and inquire whether you could regard any exertion too great that might lift me from my wretchedness, and secure your future by its union with affluence? Ah!” he continued, with tears starting to his eyes, “you know not what it is to be old and in want—to contemplate the Past lying dead with all its promises strown withered about it, and to watch the Future stepping upon you with a terrible and pitiless countenance, bearing no remedy for the disease of want but *death*, which methinks grows more fearful as its approach makes it more sure.”

Then drying his eyes on his cuff, he fell again

to smoking diligently, though his face was clouded with an air of great dejection, and his features worked like one that has not his tears under his controul. I answered, to cheer him, tho' I knew my words masked but an errant deceit, "that he might depend upon me exerting my utmost to drive his project to fruition; and that he was not to doubt but that if ever I should become mistress of a fortune, it would be my pleasure to make his old age my peculiar care."

On hearing this, he threw down his pipe, and, stepping forward, gave me a hearty embrace; then bawled for Molly to procure him another bottle; "for," said he, "wine is the oblation Fortune best loves. I doubt not she'll prove kind yet, for all that she has left me out in the cold, whilst she wantons with inferior mortals who do not half so well deserve her caresses." Then, resuming his seat, he proceeded: "I believe, my dear child, you can learn little from your father to help you to that decoration of behaviour which shall render Dr. Aston your humble slave; yet I have lived many years in the world, and have acquired a knowledge

of men which double that age might not always bring to others. If, therefore, you would not prove unsuccessful, you must suffer neither fear nor awe to possess you. It is the knowledge that mankind are fallible, and that fallibility must fail somewhere, that makes knavery in this world successful; and let philosophers prate as they will, knavery always has been and always will be successful in this world."

I held my peace; tho' I could have pointed to him as a poor illustration of his dogma. He continued :

"Flattery is a weapon which beauty never wields without execution : of flattery, therefore, do not fear to be prodigal. Only let it be so contrived that it shall always have enough truth in it to impart a conscience. An obvious lie hath very often answered indeed; but he is a clumsy flatterer who neglects to dupe the judgment as well as the conceit; and to set judgment straying, 'tis necessary that the torch with which you mislead her be lighted at the shrine of Truth. Now though I am a stranger to Dr. Aston, yet were I to be much in his company, I doubt not he would speedily discover some weakness

of which I would be quick to take advantage. He is a virtuoso—he takes a particular pride in his collections, and is in love with his own taste: I'd tickle him there. Or he is distinguished as a physician: I would trace his practice, and remind him of his skill. Or he has a conceit of his own person: I would take care to acquaint him that his style is my particular admiration—though he should rather judge of this from the daintiest and delicatest hints than from a bold confession; since a man is not like a female, and needs in this particular a greater subtlety of praise; for he has not a woman's leisure to look upon himself in a mirror, and he has distractions that call him from the study of his countenance; hence, he is not so hardened in conceit, and is therefore less willing to admit praise; though he'll swallow it readily enough if it be properly administered."

Here Mr. Boothby paused to fill himself a full glass from the second bottle of sack, which he drank with great relish; and having charged his pipe with a large pinch of the black mundung which lay in the bottom of a broken preserve pot, he continued thus: "But doubtless,

my dear, your own discernment has enabled you to pierce your master's character ; so that you have already in your mind the weakness that will best repay your aggressions."

Though I was secretly much diverted by Mr. Boothby's discourse, my face preserved a solemn gravity. Indeed, I'll not deny that it pleased me to follow him in his theoretick stratagem, though I knew it would have no issue ; for I always loved to exercise my mind in schemes of cunning, and knew that this kind of warfare, though it is best perfected by practice, may be learnt by suffering the fancy to contrive a mimic fray, and watching how the understanding marshals and directs her forces. I therefore answered,—

" I am acquainted with one particular weakness of Dr. Aston—his love for his daughter."

" That's it !" cried Mr. Boothby. " Did not Mr. Bracebridge tell me he was betrothed to her ? and that Dr. Aston was eager for the wedding, but that the gallant had too much spirit to live upon his wife ?"

" Yes. And Dr. Aston has given me to know he would part with much to see his daughter made happy by marriage with her lover."

"Then thou hast it, i'facks! Z—ds, Tishy! thou hast but to help to push this marriage on, and thou'lt render Dr. Aston eternally obliged."

"Ay," said I; "but you are to remember that if Miss Aston should marry, there will be no further need of me."

This seemed to confound him, for he remained silent, but presently cried out: "Why, if that be so, then you are to make yourself so agreeable to him, that the necessity of his daughter's leaving will render the necessity of your remaining all the greater. By heaven! I would I were in your place; for I see so fine a game before me, with so vast a booty as a reward, my blood is up to be at it! It is to be done!" he cried, in a strong passionate voice, for the wine was now in his head, and his eyes flamed in their sockets. "You have but a weak man for your opponent—your hand is strong with great cards—and Fortune stands ready to whisper your play. Never fear—never fear! you must win, child! Think of it! Why, wench, thy future stands open before me, brilliant as a Covent Garden pantomime! 'tis all light and splendour! 'tis one magnificent confusion of routs, operas, and

assemblies—and thou art the queen among 'em all! I'facks, Tishy, thou shalt hire me a drawing-room in St. James'; thou shalt buy me a gilt chair—eh, child, eh?—'twill be a convenience when I'm groaning under the gout from the port wine thou'lt send me,—a gilt chair, tasseld, wench, and lined with velvet; and thou'lt dress me in camblet and paduasoy, and perfume me with *Eau de Chipre* and *Sans Pareil*, and I'll feast on charde-perigord pie, and every dainty of the season! Eh, wench? And I'll know no walk but the Mall, and no watering-place but Bath; and I'll cut the city taverns for White's. Ay! ay! Mr. Tubbs* shall serve me,—unless you'll be generous, wench, and buy me a chariot. And, look you, as it will be the first time I was ever free of poverty,—that cursed, crippling distemper,—so I'll know how to be grateful to the charming saucy minx that worked so well for me, and brought me from this garret to a home of soft carpets and pleasant window prospects."

Then, jumping up, he catches me by the hand,

* A well-known person who let out carriages to the quality.
—L. B.

and cries out, "By G——! I'm in love with this riot of fancy. You must push on—push on, I say. D'ye hear me? You have brought Hope into this hole with you—her presence does me good—if you disappoint me—"

He let fall my hand, his brow grew black, and he fell to muttering; then catching up the bottle, he empties another full glass, and steps backwards into his chair. It was no doubt his weak state, occasioned by want of food, that gave the wine so easy a victory over his head.

I judged, however, 'twas time now to be gone; so taking a half guinea from my pocket (which was the third of all the money I had), I set it on the table, and gave him my hand to bid him farewell.

"Are ye going?" he said, looking at me dully. "Well, be off. This is no place for you. You're a woman of figure now, and your modishness kecks at my garret. 'Tis the way of the world for the young to leave the old—for the child to desert its parent. Why not? Poverty hath a grim look and a sullen carriage, and 'tis reasonable youth should shun him. Be off, I say; but see you don't disappoint me. . . .

How old am I? Why, good for another score. I could not live it out thus," he cries fiercely. "Have you ever been hungry and not procured bread? May be, wench; I treated thee ill when thou wast a little one. But to be old and want —'tis hard to bear! I could not live it out . . . so see you don't disappoint me." Then, catching sight of the money on the table, he calls out, "Is that mine?"

"It is," said I. "Use it carefully; for, with the money you have, it may procure you enough to keep you till you get more."

He looked first upon the money, then upon me, then back again upon the money. He opened his mouth to address me, but suddenly his countenance relaxed, and raising his hand to his eyes, he burst into tears. He sobbed so piteously I stood rooted. Sure there is something terrible in the spectacle of a strong man weeping. But presently recollecting I was to return to Wimpole Street by ten, I kissed him on the forehead, and slipped from the room.





CHAPTER XI.

Miss Boothby keeps another appointment.

THE more I meditated Mr. Boothby's hint, the better was I pleased with it. It certainly set me regretting I had not considered more attentively the chances of my future before I suffered myself to be betrothed to Mr. Bracebridge. I could never be brought to regard love as anything more than a useful auxiliary to ambition ; and in my eyes the man that should have the largest estate and the loftiest position, would come best recommended. I do not doubt, could I have been certain of catching Dr. Aston, I could easily have brought my passion to let loose Mr. Bracebridge. But I was not sure of winning him ; nor could I clearly see my way to make love to Dr. Aston while feeding the passion of Mr. Bracebridge. Our attachment was quite complicated enough by the fear of detection and the labour of concealment ; and I had no taste for

encumbering my abilities with a behaviour which should sit too heavily to enable me to perform my part with the nice skill and easy conduct the situation demanded.

I was a little curious to observe the behaviour of Mr. Bracebridge when he should call and find Miss Aston and me together. Happily, Miss Aston's blindness would render concealment but necessary in the voice. Poor thing ! in reviewing the past I own I must have had an uncommonly hard heart to betray so much sweetness, candour, and goodness. I believed she loved me ; but then 'twas no compliment ; for as a flame converts into flame whatever feeds it, so her heart converted into an affection whatever it admitted. She was full of sweet sympathies, which made her smiles as truthful as the words of Holy Writ. She had no experience of evil, and was therefore not to know it until it had struck her. Her pale face is often present to the mind's eye. I see it now : a face whose serenity was not solemn ; too sweet to be majestick ; 'twas the calmness of a May day, a softness not without light, yet a light that subdued rather than tinted, as I have marked a moonbeam lying on the face of a statue.

Being alone in the library, whither we had repaired for the convenience of the books, we fell into a conversation.

"'Tis surprising," she said, "how soon trouble becomes a habit ; and how, when it has become a habit, it ceases to gall and fret us. It is God's goodness that makes provision for every evil that can befall us. But sure the greatest blessing in life is a contented heart that can turn misfortunes into benefits, like the grave, which, receiving the tears of the mourners, will presently return them in flowers."

"But it is the nature of misfortune," said I, "to discontent the heart, by which evil is magnified."

"'Tis a poor heart that knows not how to distil philosophy from the evil that enters it. Besides, what is misfortune but an angel who brings us all the deeper pleasures our common humanity enjoys ? 'Tis misfortune, my dear, heads the train of all our fairest qualities. 'Tis she who summoneth virtue from her secret dwelling-place ; who instructs us in those tender sympathies which breed among us a love for one another ; who ravishes from the hardened soul the tear that proclaims all its divinity has not fled ; who

teaches us to believe in our Father in heaven; and who paints our blessed Lord in that garb of compassionate sorrow which moves our hearts to adore him for his love of us. For, like the night that discovers the glories of the spangled firmament, she darkens life that we may witness those pure, white, and shining virtues, which 'tis impossible we can behold when the strong sunlight of happiness envelopes us."

"Madam," said I, "it profits me to hear you discourse thus; and that I may be further instructed in that knowledge of peace (which is a satisfaction 'tis impossible to know when I may want), will you suffer me to ask a question?"

"Nay, ask it," said she sweetly.

"You just now spoke with pity of the heart that could not extract philosophy from woe. I would ask you, madam, if Mr. Bracebridge were to deceive you, could your heart draw satisfaction from his deception?"

Her countenance worked as though a pain had taken her; but it soon cleared. She smiled tenderly, and not without a kind of triumph, as though she should say, "'Tis a foolish question, for he'll not desert me." Then growing

grave, she pondered awhile; and presently answered,—

“It would be a great blow to me, dear. I know not if my heart could bear it. I cannot controul my physical structure: I could not prevent my heart from breaking. But if it depended on my spirits I could controul them. If my heart bore up, I could master my grief: and when once I had got my grief under, I could compel it to procure me what solace I might demand. But let us not speak of it,” she added softly.

I enjoyed a secret laugh at this illustration of her theories.

“Ah, madam,” said I gravely, “’twas truly writ by Monsieur de Rochefoucauld, that philosophy triumphs over past ills and future ills, but that present ills triumph over philosophy. And ’tis proper it should be so. I should, for my part, distrust the heart that was too quickly resigned to its sorrow. Give me the nature that will break through all the restraints of philosophy, and confess no jurisdiction but those of its own laws, which, as they come from God, cannot but be wise and good.”

“You are partly right,” says she, “but it is for religion to minister to nature. Besides, nature is

different in different people. She changes her character with every person you meet. But religion is fixed—is always the same. Nature has indeed her laws; but if some of these are just, others are licentious: and for them all to operate beneficially, they must be amenable to the higher laws of religion. But,” she added with a laugh, “I shall be presently getting beyond my depth. I know little of metaphysicks, and can only reason from my own judgment. Yet I do not think I have spoken unwisely in holding misfortune to be a blessing. ’Tis a bitter, nauseous draught; but it is an useful medicine.”

Just then stopt in my Lady Ringwood followed by Mr. Bracebridge.

“Here, Dolly, is thy lover,” cries her ladyship, “who’s been like a faithful shepherd, piping for thee through the house. ’Tis the way of the men before marriage—afterwards ’tis for the nymph to pipe for her swain—and commonly she pipes to a deaf shepherd. Miss Boothby, your servant.”

Mr. Bracebridge made me a low bow, and went straight to Miss Aston, who fell at once to speaking with him in the quick impulsive whispers she was always used to greet him with.

"Preserve me!" cried out my lady: "is it not a fine thing for an old woman at my time of life to be chasing the footsteps of a young spark an handful of summers old in search of his flame? Why, Mr. Bracebridge, d'ye know I was born in the year 1689, when William of Nassau was on the throne, and when I doubt but thy great grandmother was still in bibs? and d'ye think I can mount and descend these stairs as though I had shanks as nimble as thine?"

"Why, madam," answered Mr. Bracebridge with a laugh, "though you was so good as to offer to help me in my search after Dolly, I protest I am as obliged to you as if I had entreated your help."

"Nay, sir; say no more," replies my lady. "'Tis always a pleasure to serve so fine a gentleman and so devoted a lover. Miss Boothby, when you make up your mind to marry (which, if you are wise, you'll be a long time about; but wait till you are old, that being old, you may have an excuse to die single), I would advise you to pause until you fall in with such another as Mr. Bracebridge. For I'll not deny he has an elegant carriage, and sure he handed me out of my chair with an air that transported me to the days when ceremony

to ladies was not considered beneath the dignity of a gentleman."

Mr. Bracebridge laughed out with a hearty ringing tone, as innocent as innocence could sound. I laughed aloud too, that Miss Aston might know how I received my lady's joke. I did not look towards Mr. Bracebridge, though by the direction of his face I judged he must glance again and again at me.

"I am indeed proud of your ladyship's high opinion of me," says Mr. Bracebridge, "but I question if Miss Boothby's judgment is to be influenced by your polite language. Sure she has already some gentleman in her mind that has created for her a taste, I am not so bold as to hope I could please."

"Indeed, sir, you mistake," I answered calmly; seeing his drift, and eager to shine out before him as cunning an actor as himself, by which I believed I should raise myself in his estimation. "That taste you speak of has not yet been created, nor do I desire it. Probably I shall marry some day: for to most women, marriage is a calamity as certain as death. But if I won't avert it when it comes, I'll not hasten it."

"Nay, Miss Boothby," cries my lady, who was uncommonly literal in her interpretations, "pry-thee don't call marriage a calamity. Death, I'll allow, may appear so to you, for you are young. But of marriage I would have you speak well."

Now, how hard it was to please my lady! I had only spoke in jest, which she was too infirm to comprehend. (Sure old people are as literal as infants, who believe to the letter all you tell 'em!) What will you think when you know I talked this foolishness only to please her? for I always judged her to be a cynick, and believed the language she most loved to hear was that of abuse.

"Of course," she continued, "there are many unfortunate marriages : unfortunate to the friends who look on, but merited by the boobies who have made themselves miserable. But observation has taught me that marriage need never be-unfortunate, if those who mean to marry will but take time to attentively consider one another's behaviour and character."

"Ay, but love is blind, madam," said Mr. Bracebridge.

"Young love is," she answered quickly ; "but

give me leave to acquaint you, sir, that there are animals that are born blind, who, when they are grown, have a keener sight than those that are born with open eyes. I would advise every woman to keep her love quiet till it hath the use of its sight."

"But, madam," said I, "by nursing love you make it too dear to you to allow you to act with judgment. Suppose I am in love with a man : in obedience to your views, I keep my love hid, until it has the use of its eyes ; then I see what gives me pain ; but it is too late to relinquish my love ; long secret nurture has made its roots to grow deep. I cannot deracinate it at my will."

"Oh, grandmother," cries Miss Aston, "Miss Boothby is right."

"She is not right," replied my lady. "She is wrong. She does not know what she says. She talks as if she were a puppet instead of a human being with resolution enough to clear her mind of nonsense. Suppose, madam," she says, turning on me with foolish fierceness, "you was to sow a seed, diligently water it, procure the sun to shine upon it, favour its growth by all the artifices of gardening genius, and when it breaks through the

earth, lo ! 'tis a weed. Would you say,"—and here she fell to imitating my voice,—“I'll not pull it up, quotha ! 'Tis a weed, indeed, but I've watered and watched it so long, I've got to love it. Let it rest !” She ceased, and glared on me passionately.

“I am not sure that I would not let it rest,” I answered coldly. “Association may breed an affection even for a weed.”

“Why, then,” cries she ; “I am sorry for you.” And she got up, and with her little body curved like a bent pin, steps over to a corner table, and sourly inspected a small ivory carving.

Now I might look at Mr. Bracebridge. Our eyes met ; his softened at once ; mine answered him, while I blew a kiss with my finger-tips.

“Grandmother,” cried Miss Aston, “you are hard on Miss Boothby. She talks reasonably ; indeed she does, granny dear.”

“Why, Dolly,” answers my lady, “I'm an old woman, and if I han't allowed to have an opinion at my time of life, I'd as lief be dead.”

“Nay,” says Mr. Bracebridge, with an air of great politeness ; “it is you, madam, who will not let others have an opinion of their own ; for I

protest it is impossible to hear you without being persuaded to your views, and losing all conceit of one's own judgment."

She curtsied to him for this, and, mollified by the compliment, took a seat on a low chair near him.

"Madam," said I, "if I differ from you, give me leave to say I do so with profound respect for your superior understanding. If I have expressed myself ignorantly, I beg you will impute my language to my want of years, and not to any conceited mean pertness which is contemptible enough to think to rival you in that knowledge of life in which few could excel you."

She made me a low bow which I took care to return with as humble an air as I was mistress over; after which she said, "That she thanked me for my handsome remark, in which she did not doubt I was sincere; that for her part she knew her merits as well as her defects; and that 'twas ridiculous to suppose she could have lived since the year 1689, and not have acquired a prodigious knowledge of life."

And so, her temper being appeased, her countenance cleared; and she looked from one to the other of us with cheerful eyes.

A servant now entered to announce there was company in the drawing-room. My lady at once rose, and I was for following her, when, happening to look towards Mr. Bracebridge, I perceived him make a signal for me to stay. This I contrived to do by pretending to return certain volumes to the shelves. When I turned (my lady being gone), Mr. Bracebridge held out a note for me, which I contrived to take by passing close to him, and then went from the room. Being mounted to my chamber, I there read as follows :—

“ My dearest,—As I know not that I may have an opportunity to address you, I write this beforehand, trusting for an occasion to deliver it. I have a particular need to see and speak with you ; and therefore earnestly desire you will contrive to meet me at five o'clock by Cavendish Square where I protest I'll not detain you longer than to deliver what I have in my mind to say, which will also be, how very much I am, my dearest madam,

“ Your faithful, humble Servant,
And devoted Lover,”

It being now a quarter before four, I should not have too much time for my preparation. So that Mr. Bracebridge might know my answer, I stepped downstairs, and entering the library, with a steady voice begged Miss Aston's leave to go abroad until half an hour after five, as I was to pay a visit to a laceman's in the Oxford Road. Leave being granted, Mr. Bracebridge gave me a nod and a smile, and so I returned to make ready for the interview.

On passing the library, before quitting the house, I laid my ear to the keyhole to discover if Mr. Bracebridge was still within ; but hearing no voice, I judged he was gone.

Many chariots and chairs stood at the doors of the houses in Cavendish Square when I was arrived, and methought there were too many people about to render the choice of such a spot for our meeting judicious. Casting my eyes around, I presently espied Mr. Bracebridge advancing towards me; but when he was come to within some yards, he signed to me to follow, and turning down a street, conducted me to the privacy of a blind alley, led to by an archway, under the shadows of which he paused and received me.

"Here, dearest," said he, "we'll not be seen. I hope you did not think I should be so unwise as to endanger our love by a conversation in the publick square?"

"It would have been unwise, sir, had you done so."

"Yes; particularly as I am acquainted with no less than ten persons living there. However, here we are safe from espial; though I am not to keep you long, as I promised. But, first, may I not snatch a kiss from those sweet lips, to show you how obliged I am by your meeting me?"

I answered "That a kiss was a privilege I must not deny to the man I was to marry."

On this he snatched me in his arms and tenderly embraced me; and though I exhibited a proper coyness, and contrived to illustrate a confusion I did not feel by blushes; I took care not to be too frigid, as it was a part of my design to make him so deeply enamoured that he should hasten his happiness by marriage.

Relinquishing me, he next fell to searching his pockets, and presently pulling out a small parcel,—

"Here," says he, "is a little gewgaw, which, if you consider it only for its value, you'll despise;

but if you'll accept it as a symbol of my love, you will prize it as something very rare and genuine." Then opening it, he handed me a gold locket, very sweetly inset with blue and white stones, and elegantly engraved on the back with a picture of Cupid levelling a dart.

As I took it, I said, "I thank you for your kindness, and wish you to believe that I shall esteem this as the rarest treasure I am ever likely to own, unless it be your heart; for, as it is the first offering of your love, so therefore has it all the sweetness and freshness which belong to the early flower of spring, and which cannot be diminished by the splendours of the summer."

He answered, "It is the same with kissing; the first kiss is always the sweetest."

"It is before marriage," said I; "but to judge from the behaviour of married people, methinks *after* marriage the last kiss is the sweetest."

He laughed aloud, and catching me by the hand, he said, "Tishy, my darling, I have asked you to meet me not only that I might give you that bauble, but that I may get you to accompany me to a masquerade at Mrs. Cornelly's next Monday night. I have two tickets; and as it

will be the grandest masquerade since the days of Mr. Heydegger, 'twould be a burning shame to miss it."

"Nay," cried I, "how could I go alone with you to a masquerade?"

"Why not? Are not you to be my wife?"

"Yes; but I am not your wife yet."

"Now, dearest, you must not disappoint me. Rather than you should say nay, I'd fall on my knees on these stones, and, in that tormenting posture, detain you by the hand, till from sheer pity you should answer yes."

"But suppose we should be seen there?"

"Who's to know us in dominos? Look'ee, Tishy, I'll not be refused. I have got ready a room for you in a lady's house, whose honour and discretion we may depend on. You will dress yourself there, and then we'll step into chairs and be carried to Soho. You can leave at whatever hour you please, return to the lodging, remove your dress, and get back to Wimpole Street, with no mortal but myself to know of your frisk. What have you to say against it?"

As all this favoured my scheme upon his passion, I had nothing to say against it. But

though I made up my mind to go, I thought it would be more becoming in me to hang back awhile from his proposal, so that when I yielded, 'twould seem I loved him more than my modesty.

"Sir," I said, "as I shall be one day your wife, so it should be my pride to give you occasion always to respect me. But if I attend you alone to a masquerade, what title shall I have to your esteem?"

"Nay, dearest," says he fondly; "do you think your kindness is like to forfeit my esteem? Sure you know me not, if you think I am not more easily to be won by a tender, yielding nature, than by a character made as prickly by virtues as the porcupine. Besides, you should consider that since we love each other with so violent a passion—at least I'll answer for mine—"

"And I for mine," said I, languishingly.

"'Twould be," he continued, "a thousand shames were we not to seize upon every occasion to be together. Be sure I'll arrange matters that your delicacy shall be no more pained than was you to be going to an assembly under the escort of your father. I warrant you, 'twill be a heavy disappointment for me should you refuse;

for ever since I have entertained the idea, I have been anticipating the happiness of an whole evening passed in uninterrupted enjoyment of your company. And, dearest, indeed you stand in need of a little diversion; for the constraint and dulness of Wimpole Street will weigh as heavy upon you as frost, if you do not thaw the burden by suffering the warm light of pleasure to shine upon it."

"Ah, sir!" said I, with a roguish look, "sure you have borrowed the song of the syren to decoy me from the path of duty. What should a poor girl's resolution avail against the musick and beauty of so consummate a pleader!"

"Then you will come?" cries he, eagerly.

"Since you will it," said I; "it is not for a mistress to deny so tender and earnest a lover. Perhaps, sir, you will think better of my love, now that you see how I sacrifice decorum on its shrine."

"I never doubted thy love, child," he answered, pressing my hand to his mouth; "indeed, my own passion is too violent to admit doubt. When we love wildly we love blindly."

"Well, sir, and now about the arrangements."

He answered, "At half an hour after seven on Monday, you will come to No. 18, Great Castle Street, where you will meet me. A maid will conduct you to a chamber, where you'll find a masquerade dress you can exchange for your own. You'll know what excuses to contrive to account for your absence to the Astons."

"I will pretend I am to visit Mr. Boothby."

"That will do," said he. Then inspecting his watch, "'Tis time we should part." He would have embraced me, but curtseying to him with a laugh, I tripped away, and reached Wimpole Street five minutes after the time I had proposed to return.





CHAPTER XII.

Mr. Boothby makes his daughter a visit.

THE next day, Dr. Aston looking into the library and finding me alone (for Miss Aston was taking the air with my lady in the chariot), came in and seated himself.

"It is absurd," said he, "considering we two live in the same house, how little we see of one another. Some might think it a privilege to be so much occupied as to have no leisure for the serious business of pleasure; but I protest I would be glad to dispense with a few of my patients, that, if I lost money, I might gain time."

"I do not doubt, sir, you find it very harassing to be so much occupied."

"Indeed I do, Miss Boothby; and it is beginning to impair my health too. You yourself know how seldom I can get my dinner as it comes hot from the cook. I can never retire to rest with the conviction that I shall enjoy an uninterrupted

repose until the morning. I am obliged to live strictly, lest appetite should cloud my judgment or wine impair the coherence of my views. I am indeed a martyr, madam : at home I am denied any continuance of enjoyment, and abroad I am wearied and disgusted by the peevish complaints of valetudinarians, to prescribe for whom is positively a violation of medical honour, whilst to neglect them is to give pain to minds already sufficiently tortured by the pangs of hypochondriasm."

"Sure, sir," said I, with a smile, "there can be no further need for you to devote yourself to so ungenerous a calling. 'Tis time you should make society repay you for the care you have taken of it by causing it to unfold its diversions and inviting you to their participation."

"Ah, madam," said he, with a smile, "'tis all very well to talk of retiring ; I could have left my profession a long time ago, but I pushed on with it, always feeding my desire of retirement with a perpetual renovation of vows, to end in an eternal succession of disappointments ; and now when I am prepared to abandon it, comes an obstacle in my daughter's marriage. She will

leave me, and I shall miss her—miss her, indeed, so acutely, that I know not what I should do had I no occupation to give employment to my mind.”

“ I can readily feel with you, sir, in that.”

“ And yet I hardly know why I should talk of Dolly’s marriage; for I’ve a notion she’ll never marry. It is absurd to suppose that a young man whose passion for a woman is sincere would suffer such an impediment as Mr. Bracebridge pretends or believes to stand between him and his wife. No, madam; my conviction is, he does not love her.”

“ Nay, sir, why should you think that ?”

“ Because of his procrastination. Real passion is always eager. It is blind to just obstructions, and impatient of delay.”

“ Yet Miss Aston has a sincere belief in his love. And she should be a better judge of his heart than you.”

“ Ay, but Dolly is blind, and is without that faculty by which distrust is best inspired. And then her nature is all sweetness; and her candour is too great to allow a doubt of another’s deceit to find footing in her mind. But I that have eyes and a large experience have not her faith.”

I did not answer.

"You will remember," says he, "I spoke to you of my scheme of imparting half Dolly's fortune to Sir Charles, that young Bracebridge might conceive the money was his father's. This I thought would satisfy his scrupulous pride. But I've since revolved this notion, and have determined to abandon it, for I'll not bribe any man to wed my child; and what is more, my faith in Mr. Bracebridge's honour is so shaken by his treatment of my daughter, that I protest were it not for Dolly I'd deny him my house."

I could see he restrained himself from speaking passionately, though his blood was up and his eyes gleamed with anger.

"But why should you distrust his love, sir?" I asked. "He may be sincere; for my part, I firmly believe he loves Miss Aston (who would not that knew her?); and so far as I can see, his great fault is too nice an honour, too cautious a concern for his own independence, which some would applaud as manly, tho', I must say, he pushes it in this case to uncommon limits."

"I wish I could think so well of him," he

answered gloomily. "There was a time when I was vastly taken with the young fellow ; I feigned a ready acquiescence in his scrupulous pride (which I then thought did him no dishonour), though I believed his objections would soon become attenuated by time, and that he would be glad to risk the phantom indignities he professed to fear for the solid enjoyments of a loving wife and an handsome fortune. But he has proved stubborn beyond the reach of conjecture, nor am I to blame if this honour of his has been the means of breeding distrust. Though I wish I could think well of him for Dolly's sake. Why," he cried with a blow on his knee, "will he not marry her ? Sure no woman ever endured a prig so long !"

Just then the footman entered, and informed me there was a man that desired to speak with me. Being asked where he was, the fellow replied he was in the hall, as he was too meanly dressed to be admitted into the drawing-room. Dr. Aston rose and went out ; I followed him. Presently I caught sight of Mr. Boothby standing at the window in the hall. Dr. Aston likewise saw him, and with a high air of breeding shook him warmly by the hand, whilst he begged he

would excuse the dulness of the servant, who was new to the house, and indeed to his business, and was therefore to be excused for not knowing how to treat a gentleman.

Mr. Boothby with a low bow begged Dr. Aston to be under no concern for him ; for that he was used to the behaviour of the servants at the mansions of the great, who judged a man rather by his coat than his manners. At this Dr. Aston smiled, and bidding me see to Mr. Boothby and call for wine, made his congee. I then conducted Mr. Boothby to the library.

To be candid, the servant was not to be censured for the mistake he had made. Mr. Boothby's appearance was that of a man in great destitution. His breeches were gone at the knees, his stockings were old and dirty, his coat was badly patched at the elbow, and his waistcoat was closely buttoned to the throat to conceal the want of a shirt. I felt angry he should have come to me in such an attire ; but as I had always my emotions under my controul, so he was not to know but that I looked on his forlorn figure with commiseration.

“ Well, Tishy,” says he, with a wink, “ you’re

playing your cards well, wench! To think I should have interrupted ye! I could have eaten my head when I saw I was the means of breaking up your *tête-à-tête*. Tell me,—does he bite?"

I forced a smile, and nodded my head.

"To think," says he, casting his eyes around the room, "that the day will come when you shall be mistress of all these fine things! Why, I'd be glad, I would, to have the value of this carpet alone in my pocket. And that statue there—Cleopatra! By heaven, Lætitia, you must not lose this opportunity! Look on my scurvy dress, and draw incitement from it; for if you fail, *cujus vulturis hoc erit cadaver?*"

"You must repress your impatience. Great heights are slowly scaled," said I.

"Why, I suppose you're right; but you'd be impatient too if you was me. Didn't Dr. Aston bid you order wine?"

I stepped to the bell. Before the footman came, "Just give an order for some biscuits too," said he.

I bade the man bring both. Mr. Boothby sat silent, regarding the room with admiring awe, till the refreshments were set before him. Then

filling himself a glass, he says, looking full upon the Cleopatra, "I drink to thy beauty; since it is by beauty I am to rise to fortune." After which he fell to cramming his mouth with cakes and sweetmeats like a starved man. When his appetite seemed in some measure appeased, he said,—

"On my soul, Tishy, your father owes you much. 'Rat me, if this han't the best wine I've tasted since Joe Mickle of the *Bellevue* broke. And you're to make my fortune wench—tho' I would have you to know it was I who got you here."

"I'll not forget you," said I, "when I am come to my fortune."

"Depend on't," said he, "I'll not let you. But does he bite?—you han't answered me."

"He must find something agreeable in me, or he'd not seek my company."

"He was with you then, of his own accord just now?"

"Yes," said I.

He crossed his legs, stroked his chin, and broke into a slow grin, which broadening, presently expanded into a laugh, that grew so loud, I was

fain to silence him by bidding him take more wine.

"You'll do! you'll do!" he cried out. "'Tis in you. You have not a drop of your mother's blood in you. My Lavinia had rather have died than made love by stratagem. Faith, she was a pretty fool,—better to others than to herself. But *you* are true to Lætitia. You'll never forsake Lætitia, egad! Thy religion, thy love, thy hopes, thy conscience, thy memory, are all,—Lætitia. I'd not have it otherwise. But where did ye get it, wench? For my part, I have always been more a fool than a rogue. The privilege was never mine to draw down over my countenance that excellent mask of merriment or melancholy, of softness or severity, of sweetness or sourness, such as is at thy command,—ay, like I could let down or draw up a blind. 'Tis an admirable gift: but see you don't overleap your hopes. I ask ye, wench, does he bite?"

"I have answered you."

"To be sure. Lord, how my memory's leaving me!"

Then getting up he walked with the uncertain step of want to a side table, crying, "I must see

these beauties whilst I can. You was never a lover of the beautiful child." I shrewdly watched him as he bent over the table. His back being turned on me, he probably supposed I could not witness his movements; but I presently saw him pass a small exquisite ivory carving of a Roman temple to his pocket; on which I jumped up.

"My God!" I cried, "what do you do?"

He pulled the thing from his pocket at once, and laid it upon the table; then rubbed his eyes with the back of his hands, and turning a white, hungry face to me, muttered,—

"I have not eaten for two days."

"I will get you the means of food," said I, "but you must not stay here. Follow me, and remain in the hall." As a dog follows one that has beaten him, so he came out after me. I closed the door, bade him await me, and ran upstairs to my chamber, where emptying my purse of a guinea, I returned and gave him the money. He clutched my hand that gave it fiercely, opened the house-door, and went away.





CHAPTER XIII.

Containing the humours of a Masquerade.

MONDAY being come, I looked forward with some degree of trepidation (which, however, I was very careful to dissemble) to the diversion of the evening. As to my conduct, I was not sensible I should be violating any particular rule of propriety. What I feared was lest I should be detected at the masquerade, and reported to Dr. Aston, who would, I judged, not scruple to dismiss me for such behaviour. I had taken care to mention to Miss Aston that I was engaged to a little card-party at my father's, and begged her consent to be present, which she readily gave.

The evening being arrived, I left the house, not without a beating heart, and calling a coach, bid the fellow drive me to Castle Street. It was fortunately dark, and as I wore a calash, I incurred little risk of my countenance being remem-

bered. The fellow drove leisurely, which brought me to Castle Street later by ten minutes than the appointed time. I survey'd the house before I knocked, and observed it to be a decent, well-built abode. A maid responded to my summons, who, without inquiring my name, admitted me. As I went upstairs I was careful to conceal my face, for I had no mind to be remembered. Presently a door was flung open, and Mr. Bracebridge stood forth. I knew him at once, tho' he was habited like a cavalier in the reign of King Charles the Second, and his wig of long flowing curls very sensibly altered the familiar air of his countenance. 'Twould have been impossible for any Jacobite to have contemplated him without emotion, so forcibly would his elegant figure, his beautiful countenance, his erect and haughty carriage, have recalled that train of noble and chivalrous Englishmen who bled and died for their great but unhappy sovereign. He made me a bow of tip-top quality breeding, and, taking my hand, conducted me within the chamber, which I found to be a small, decent apartment, which might be used by lodgers as a parlour.

"This house, my dearest," says he, in his soth

voice, "is kept by a female who was for many years housekeeper to a family with whom I have been acquainted since my childhood. 'Tis a respectable lodging-house; and, indeed, the rooms have only just been vacated by a lady of quality. I gave Mrs. Lewis to know I was escorting a lady to a masquerade, to whom it would be a convenience to dress abroad, and solicited the use of these rooms, which she very kindly placed at my disposal. How do you like me in this dress, Tishy?"

"Why," said I, "I think the three kingdoms could not show a prettier fellow nor a finer gentleman."

"Thank you, my dear. I doubt not when you are dressed you will ravish from me a still handsomer compliment."

Then going to the door he called aloud for the maid, who presently attending with a candle, conducted me to a chamber. She would have remained to help me to dress, and I should have been glad of her assistance; but I was eager she should see nothing of my face, and therefore declined her offer. Locking the door, I cast my eyes on the bed, and saw spread the complete

dress of a shepherdess. I lost no time to equip myself; and though the mirror was small, and the candle emitted but a feeble ray, I could still discern enough of my shadow to know I looked very lovely, and made, as a shepherdess, quite as beautiful a woman as he, as a cavalier, made a handsome man.

When I went downstairs he fell into a rapture at my appearance, and protested he would tie my mask on with his own hands in such a manner that I should not be able to remove it; "for," cried he, "if your lovely face should be seen, the whole assembly will follow you,—and you will bid fair to conceive a passion for some finer gentleman than I, whose recommendation should be his surprising admiration,—though I would defy the world to procure you a greater admirer than your Jackey."

"And I, my dear," said I, "would defy the world to procure me a man whom I would choose in preference to my Jackey. A woman's first love is always the sweetest and deepest; my passion for you lies deep; and it will be your own fault if it be made possible for any hand to uproot it and plant a new love in its room."

On this he embraced me; and then calling the maid, bade her step below and inquire if the chairs waited. She presently returned, saying they were there; on which we put on our masks. Then taking me by the hand, he led me to the house-door and placed me in a chair. So we started, he following in another chair: and presently we were set down at Carlisle House.

I was greatly diverted by the show of chariots and chairs that thronged the entrance of the building. A crowd stood on either side who clapped or jeered the masquers, according as their costumes delighted or disgusted 'em. For our parts we managed to escape all comment; but this I attribute to our fortune in having a *Punch* before us, whose long nose, hump, and twisted legs, procured him all the attention and much of the abuse of the mob.

Passing through the hall we entered the Great Room, and found ourselves in a mighty crowd. The lights, the musick, the splendid dresses, the beautiful faces and figures of many of the company, acted upon me like enchantment. My spirits sensibly rose to the festal tumult. I was particularly pleased with the dancers, but found

more entertainment in contemplating the dresses. These, for the most part, were very magnificent. In course, much of the jewellery that glittered was paste; yet it had a very imposing appearance, particularly on the person of a lady of majestick appearance (who, 'twas presently whispered by Mr. Bracebridge, was Miss Palk, a daughter of Lord Barrington), who was in the character of an Indian sultana, and was habited in a robe of cloth of gold, with a rich veil, with the seams of her habit embroidered with precious stones. There was a figure of Adam in flesh-coloured silk, with an apron of fig-leaves, who jumped about in so frolicsome a manner as set me laughing very heartily; also a running footman, richly dressed, with cap set in diamonds; two jockeys from Newmarket; a gentleman dressed like a Chinaman; a politician run mad for *Wilkes* and *Liberty*; with many more odd figures, all very finely dressed, and making a rare show.

I walked with Mr. Bracebridge through the rooms, vastly pleased with the scene. The company grew as the time passed; and soon the spacious room was full of such a glittering crowd as *sure* was never before assembled. But it was

a quality crowd, as you might tell by the musick of the laughter and the silver softness of the women's voices. The humours of the entertainment were innumerable; let the eye turn where it would, it must meet some object to breed delight, merriment, or admiration. Here was a reverend friar making love to a sweet little page, who, however aptly he might mask his face, could not hide his figure; there was a train-band captain, with long false nose and fiercely cocked hat, who having imbibed too freely of strong waters, was now so far gone as to roar out curses on every man that had the ill-luck to touch him. Here was a double man, half miller, half chimney-sweep, dancing a jig and round about without his wig: there was *Alexander* walking with *Hamlet*, and the Great Mogul taking snuff with a Highlander. When the eye was satisfied the ear could make her report, which was entertaining enough; for there were many Macaronis in the company who were very eager to pass for wits, and that their listeners might not mistake their ambition, discharged an incessant artillery of jokes, some of which were sufficiently diverting.

We took a turn in some of the dances; and on

more than one occasion I found my performance was the admiration of many who followed us ; for I overheard several such remarks, as "Sure she swims rather than dances !" "Did any one ever see such elegance of action ?" "Her feet keep time as pat to the musick as the beat of the leader." I was the more gratified by this praise, because I was sure Mr. Bracebridge overheard it ; and as it is a lover's delight to hear his mistress's charms commended by others, I judged this applause from strangers must raise me yet higher in his admiration. We then listened awhile to the singing, which was wonderfully fine ; especially the Signora Clarini, who delivered the favourite air in "The Padlock" with great sweetness : whilst a young lady and a gentleman sang very gracefully that excellent song in "The Grub-street Opera,"—" *Oh think not the maid whom you scorn.*"

Whilst I stood listening to this duetto, my attention was called to one that was dressed like a *Headsman*, who, by the posture of his head rather than by his eyes (which were sunk beneath the black vizard,) I judged was watching me. So *stedfast* was his gaze that it presently rendered

me uneasy ; and, eager to shift out of his way, I desired Mr. Bracebridge to lead me to another part of the room. The *Headsman* did not follow : or at least I did not see him ; and my spirits presently returning, he slipped from my memory. Yet while my recollection of him was fresh, my apprehensions were keen. Perhaps the man's garb helped my dismay ; for indeed he looked dismal enough, and I wondered any one should have hit upon so bloody a costume as that of an executioner to appear in at a masquerade.

Soon after, Mr. Bracebridge proposed we should go upstairs, where we might take some refreshments. But we had difficulty to find a chamber that was unoccupied, for even at that early hour many couples had commenced in earnest the serious business of love-making, and wherever we went we found looks that warned us we were intruders. At last we hit upon a room that held but two couples, who were so preoccupied with their own affairs, that we stood in no danger of being annoyed by their scrutiny. Here we were furnished with a supper including some excellent claret and burnt wine, of which, however, I partook sparingly, as I knew I should stand in

want of my reason. But I was not displeased to see Mr. Bracebridge drink freely ; for I regarded wine as the most powerful auxiliary a woman can command when she hath designs on a man's heart ; and I hoped that the fumes of the liquor, coupled with my behaviour, would so melt Mr. Bracebridge, that he should name the time of our espousal before we parted. As we sat there, we heard the strains of the musick and the joyous merriment of the masquers rise to our chamber ; whilst over against us sat the two couples, whispering one another, rebuking, toying, and embracing like idiots.

I would not here repeat what passed between Mr. Bracebridge and me, for to conceal nothing, the wine being mounted to his head, he talked much nonsense. But it was my business to match him in his folly ; so I fed his love by a pretty rebellion. I urged his protestations by affecting incredulity. From whispers his voice grew to a louder note ; he would have had me lay aside my mask that he might see my face, but I absolutely refused, protesting if he persisted, I would quit the assembly. Slowly I witnessed the approach of *that* to elicit which had been the chief motive

that took me to the masquerade. He grew passionate and warm. He ravished from me an oath that I loved him above any other man. After which, snatching my hand, he desired me to say that I would become his wife at once.

Now was the time for my familiar caution to exert her dexterity,—for cunning to watch, and for patience to try him. I asked him in a cold voice, “What he meant by my becoming his wife at once?”

He cried, “I mean will you marry me, so soon as I can procure a parson to unite us?”

“When would this be accomplished?” I asked.

“It would require a few days,” he said. “I should have to procure the licence and the clergyman. They are both easily got. I know a young curate who was with me at Eton, who for old friendship’s sake would be glad to do my bidding. He would meet us at Castle Street, go through the ceremony, and not a soul besides the three of us would know you was my wife until matters should enable me to make it publick.”

Though my heart fluttered with joy (for I saw he was really in earnest), I drew a long breath,

and heaving a sigh, said, after a pause, "That it was an offer of which I was very sensible of the honour, but that I should require time to deliberate; for marriage was like a web, into which it was easy enough to fly, but not so easy to escape; that I should like to speak with my father, as I needed the counsel of another in so grave an undertaking," and was proceeding thus, when he interrupted me by crying out,—

"What, my Lætitia, is it possible you distrust my honour? Sure you do me a dreadful injury. Why should you call marriage a web? or if it be a web, would marriage with *me* be such a web as you would be glad to escape from? Think, my beloved, of what you say. As to taking your father into your counsel, I would advise you not to betray a secret that would confound us all were it known. If he should advise you against marriage with me, and should you take his advice, remember that my secret would be known to him, and that he might at any moment betray me to the resentment of Sir Charles. Besides, if I do not marry you, I shall marry Miss Aston; for after you, whom could I love, Lætitia? Therefore, since I could not marry for love, I

should act like other fops, and marry for money, and be careful to choose her who had the largest fortune with the sweetest temper. So dearest, you'll deny me no longer. What does Lætitia say?"

What should I say? I liked him well; I desired to marry him; his offer was the offer I had inspired and impelled; and if I had toyed with it, it was because I thought it politick to seem slow rather than hasty.

So after coquetting with his passion awhile, I gave him the answer he sought; but after tenderly breathing it, happening to cast my eyes towards the door, I spied there the figure of the *Headsman* who stood looking stedfastly on us. I started: he saw my movement of alarm and went away.

"Mr. Bracebridge," said I, "prythee tell me the time."

He drew out his watch, and replied 'twas twenty minutes after eleven.

"I must go," said I. "It is not only late, but I am apprehensive that I am watched or even known. Do not let us dare the gods. Indeed I can no longer remain with comfort."

My uneasiness will presently grow upon me, and force me from this place in terror."

He saw by my resolute air that his importunities would not prevail; so though for ceremony's sake he began a few entreaties, he speedily silenced them, and emptying his glass, conducted me downstairs. Whilst he called the chairs, I stood within the vestibule. I did not dare look about me, lest I should again see the figure that had excited my apprehension; yet at last, my curiosity proving brisker than my caution, I turned my head, and saw him standing with folded arms at the extremity of the entrance, watching me as Fate personified might watch his victim.

Here Mr. Bracebridge came to conduct me to my chair. I stepped in, and letting down the curtain, breathed freely to think I was out of danger of discovery.

Mr. Bracebridge's chair kept close to mine and in ten minutes we had reached Castle Street; for the chairmen were eager to return, and stepped out briskly. The door being opened with a key, Mr. Bracebridge led me within, and taking a light from the table in the passage, conducted

me upstairs; but fancying I heard footsteps following us, I turned, and saw the figure of the *Headsman*, on which I uttered a piercing cry, and would have fallen, but Mr. Bracebridge, suddenly turning, seized me by the arm and supported me to the drawing-room. The light of the candle being full on his eyes, had doubtless prevented him from seeing the figure; and he remained unconscious of its presence, until, having led me to a sofa, he turned to close the door, and found it shut, with the figure of the *Headsman* upright against it.

He recoiled; then approaching the figure, exclaimed, "What do you do here?"

The figure, in a gruff, angry voice, said, "Miss Boothby, remove your mask." This command, uttered like a threat, I obeyed. He then turned to Mr. Bracebridge. "Unmask, sir!" he cried.

Mr. Bracebridge replied by bidding him go to the d——! Then adding he was not afraid to show his face to any man, uncovered himself, crying fiercely, "And now, sir, *you* unmask, or I'll tear the disguise from your face!"

The figure, without a word, pulled off his vizard, and disclosed the features of Mr. Boothby.

I looked upon him with horror, and shrank from the spectacle. His face was of an universal red, and swollen with passion ; his eyes, inflamed by drink, gleamed like a dog's. He clenched his fist, and stepping close, uttered an horrid imprecation between his teeth, whilst he asked Mr. Bracebridge what he meant by ruining his daughter ?

Mr. Bracebridge was at first pale on beholding Mr. Boothby ; but his insulting language brought the blood to his face, and made it crimson. He tried to steady his voice and repress his passion, while he answered, "That Miss Boothby was pure for him ;" but he visibly trembled from head to foot, and I know not which presented the most shocking spectacle of rage, Mr. Boothby or Mr. Bracebridge.

"You're a liar and a scoundrel !" hoarsely cried the other, and he added a term I must not write.

Mr. Bracebridge's reply was a blow, so sudden, so fierce, so well planted, that it sent Mr. Boothby staggering to the door, where he sank, with his hand to his head.

Mr. Bracebridge stood with opened nostrils,

head tossed back, form quivering, eyes flaming, like a war-horse that hath sniffed blood and is frenzied by the trumpet blast. But Mr. Boothby, suddenly getting on his legs, rushed like a bull upon him, and gave him two blows. I heard a moan; there was a crash, and I saw Mr. Bracebridge extended motionless on the floor, with the blood pouring from his nostrils, and with a long wound just above his ear, dealt him by the sharp edge of the mantelpiece against which Mr. Boothby's fury had hurled him.

I could not stir; I could only look on like a statue to whom the faculty of sight has been miraculously given.

The spectacle of blood stunned Mr. Boothby into stillness. All his passion left him. He uttered a deep groan, and going over to Mr. Bracebridge, knelt by his side, and wildly stared on him. He put his ear to his mouth; he took his wrist to feel for a pulse; then, with a murderer's face, he turned to me, and said in a hollow whisper:—

“I fear I have killed him.”

I started up at this, and cried out, “What shall we do?”

He looked upon me with a countenance white and blank as my palm. I said, "I'll go change my dress."

"Is your dress here?" he asked hastily.

I answered it was.

"Go!" cried he, quickly. "I'll keep watch. Take no thought of this, but hurry, hurry! If we are broken in on now, we are as good as hanged."

I took the candle with a hand that shook like a coal-flame.

"Set that down," cries he; "would you leave me in the dark?"

I looked around and spied a piece of candle in a girandole. I stood on a chair to remove it, and went upstairs, the wax crawling over my hand. As he bid me, so I acted. I took no thought; indeed, I dared not, lest I should swoon. I fed my fear with a vision of the gallows, that it might breed haste; and having changed my dress, joined Mr. Boothby.

"Did any one hear you, think ye?" he asked.

"I know not," said I.

I found it hard to speak; and as I looked upon the dead man, my face grew tense, as though a bitter cold gale blew upon it.

Mr. Boothby stepped to the door and looked out; held his breath and listened; no sound. He beckoned me with a thin, long hand; I followed; he locked the door and thrust the key beneath the stair carpet; he crept below, I after him, with no more noise than water makes slipping over a smooth bed. Soon we gained the street, and pushed forward.

We spoke not till we gained the Oxford Road, when he stopped beneath a lamp, and asked me, "whether his clothes were bloody?" I examined them attentively, and perceiving no stain or patch, replied, "they were clean as far as I could judge by that light." He next asked me if I had any pieces, and on my replying, yes, he bawled for a coach, adding surlily, "he would not be followed through the street in that dress."

When he was seated, I stood on the pavement thinking on what I had best do; but he cut short my reverie by bidding me get into the coach. On gaining his lodging, I heard a clock sound twelve. He entered the room, flung himself upon the bed, and fell to groaning, "O my God! what have I done this night!"

"What took you to the masquerade?" I asked.

“Starvation!” he answered fiercely. “The hope of picking up a jewel or of picking a pocket. By Heaven!” he cries, fetching his knee a blow, “it has come to *that!* ’Twas thy cursed guinea procured me the ticket, and Fitzpatrick lent me the costume. What a mad resource! what a mad resource! I had read of one that had found a diamond star at the Pantheon t’other night; and methought I might meet with some such luck at Carlisle House. And but for you, I’d not have come away so poorly rewarded, for there was a drunken fop with a pocketful of guineas that only wanted extracting! But you took me off. I spied you at once. I knew you, for all your trappings!”

Then looking fiercely on me, who stood with a white face and black open eyes (as I could see by the mirror) he roared,—

“’Twas thy fault, thou wanton! Hadst thou not yielded to him, I had not killed him; though, Heaven confound him, he struck me first!”

“I am pure for Mr. Bracebridge,” I answered; “we were to have been married shortly.”

“Did he tell you this?” said he.

“Yes.”

“He’s a liar! he never meant it! he had a

design upon you. Don't you know he's betrothed to Miss Aston, and d'ye think he'd forfeit her fortune for your embraces?"

And here he called me a number of bitter names, cursing me heartily for having made a fool of him concerning Dr. Aston, and for being the means of leading him to do murder. I was too overcome to reply; and indeed I was almost broken down with my grief. He, likewise, was too sensible of the dreadful adventure of the night to persist in his abuse. I think he had stormed only to break through the terrible oppression of his conscience, as at an *auto-da-fé* the priests bellow to the crowd that they may drown by their voices the lamentations of the wretches who burn. There fell then a long pause, during which he eagerly inspected his clothes, lest there should be a speck of blood upon them. Afterwards, looking up fiercely, he cried,—

"What do you mean to do?"

"I shall return to Wimpole Street. What else?"

"Did you love Mr. Bracebridge?"

"I loved him well. Had I a heart to break, this catastrophe would kill me."

"But you talk coolly. Your mouth is firm. Your face is steady. But for your paleness and a queer gleam in your eyes, you might only now have left the masquerade."

I answered, "If I do not controul myself, I shall betray you. Would you like to lie at the Gate House on a charge of murder? Nor I, indeed. Neither do I desire to part with Dr. Aston. Should he dismiss me, where shall I go? But if I wear this stubborn mask of a face, who shall connect us with this crime?"

"Right," he said; "you have a sharper judgment than I. If we would avert suspicion, it is plain you must return to Dr. Aston. Does he know you was to go to the masquerade?"

"No. He believes I am spending the evening with company here."

"Then get you gone," he cried. "But let me have a piece before you go. Look at my hands,"—he stretched them forth, and they shook like a leaf to the air,—"*I want a dram to give them nerve.*"

I gave him the half of what I had, and was turning to depart, when he suddenly called out, "*I must see you home, wench. There'll be*

a footman to admit you, and he'll see me. ' Is not here a fine idea ? they'll never doubt but you was with me all to-night." Saying which, he fell to eagerly stripping off his masquerade dress, and in a few moments was equipped in his ordinary clothes. We then sallied forth.





CHAPTER XIV.

Miss Boothby consoles Miss Aston.

I PROMISE you I did not rest that night. Mr. Boothby's stratagem was so far successful, that the footman who replied to his knock, remembered him as the gentleman who had procured him-a reprimand from Dr. Aston, and was careful this time to exhibit more politeness.

I went upstairs, and when I was in my chamber then I began to think.

How shall I acquaint you with my thoughts? Their disclosure would weary you. Happily I was blessed with uncommon fortitude. I discovered I could think on Mr. Bracebridge's death without that sickness of heart I feared would enter into such a reverie. And now I understood that, judging by the effect of his death upon me, I had greatly magnified my passion for him. But *indeed* I might have known that it was impossible

for such a nature as mine to love. Vanity, hope, ambition might inspire a sentiment that I would mistake for the tender passion, but never could I love with that depth of feeling which makes bereavement misery, unless death, when he ravished from me my man, should also ravish from me my fortune and position.

Yet did I not close my eyes throughout the night ; for my mind was greatly disordered, and I could not forbear speculating on the behaviour of Miss Aston when she should learn her lover was dead. When I rose in the morning, I took care to lay on an extra coating of vermilion to disguise the uncommon paleness of my countenance ; for though I had nothing to fear from Miss Aston, methought if I should encounter her father, his critical inspection would take such observation of my air as might hereafter do me no service.

On Miss Aston's bell ringing, I went to her chamber as was my custom, and found her in cheerful spirits. She inquired whether I had enjoyed the card party at Mr. Boothby's ; and put various other questions with that sweetness of sympathy for which she is distinguished. Fortunately I did not meet Dr. Aston ; but methought

Lady Ringwood fastened a somewhat stedfast gaze upon me, when in reply to her question "Child, what makes you so white?" I replied, "I did not return until late from Mr. Boothby's, and that my rest being broken, I had rose somewhat fatigued."

At eleven o'clock Miss Aston and I went abroad; we returned at one. When we were entered, I conducted Miss Aston to her chamber, where presently came a servant to summon me to Dr. Aston. Now was come the moment that demanded the utmost exertion of those qualities which enriched my character. I stepped below and entered the library, where I found my lady gazing at Dr. Aston with a foolish face of terror, whilst he sat staring with a white countenance on the sky through the window. He placed me a chair, and said,—

"I have asked you to come to me, madam, that I might acquaint you with an appalling piece of news which has just been brought me by a servant of my friend Sir Charles Bracebridge. His son, Mr. Bracebridge, was found early this morning lying murdered in a house in Castle Street."

“Murdered!” I cried with such a tragick start as would have done honour to Mrs. Barry.

“Yes,” said he. “How it happened I am not yet informed. Whether it was done from revenge, or robbery, or by some one in the house (which bears an ill character), I have yet to hear. But my great trouble now is, how the news shall be conveyed to Miss Aston. Lady Ringwood thinks you would prove the most delicate bearer of it, if you would not object to the duty.”

Though he mastered his voice and spoke deliberately, I could see he was greatly affected.

I answered, “I am overwhelmed by this sudden intelligence. Its suddenness makes it awful. Anything I could do, sir, to lighten your concern I will cheerfully perform; yet I cannot but think that such news would come best from the lips of a parent. The heart can better endure a sudden sorrow when it is imparted by a loved one.”

“Ay,” he answered; “but it would kill me to witness her grief.”

“Child,” says my lady, “you are to know that Dolly is a Christian, with a deep faith in the mercy of God, with fortitude that owes its strength to piety, and with a spirit ready to submit without

murmur to the chastisement of its Maker. 'Tis in nature she should shed tears over her sorrows; for her heart is now widowed, and you would not wish but that the fulness of her woe should distil from her eyes, and so lighten its weight. But be sure she will give you no pain by too sharp an expression of suffering. She hath never deserted her God in the days of her happiness: and in this hour of her sorrow, be sure God will not desert her."

Dr. Aston answered, "Then I will go to her; and may God give me strength to break the news to her tenderly."

"I would go to her myself," says my lady, "but in old age there is as much bluntness as in childhood. I should fear to speak too much or too little; and haply I do not fully compass the significance of her loss. 'Tis harder to lose a mother or a father, 'tis harder to lose a husband or a child; I have lost all, and yet I live. God keeps the tree upright though the fruit fall; and I cannot think Mr. Bracebridge truly loved her, or she would have been his wife long since."

Dr. Aston left the room; and my lady and I sat

looking on one another for some time without speaking. At last, she says :—

“ I am deeply concerned for my poor dear Dolly. Sure he was as handsome a young fellow as ever I clapt eyes on. She loved him well ; yet I doubt if her love was returned. I doubt it, my dear. A man's passion is seldom under the control of his judgment. Had there been more love in his heart, there would have been less room for honour. Yet he was a fine gentleman. 'Tis sudden. 'Tis sad ! ”

She raised her handkerchief to her eyes, and continued,—

“ We are here to-day and we are gone to-morrow. We are like shadows that are cast in the morning, and vanish when the night comes. These sudden calls are very awful. Think of that young spirit hasting forth to meet its Maker, stained with unnumbered sins, and laden with a weight of iniquity which repentance might have eased him of had the angel of death given him a hint of his presence instead of the mortal blow. My dear, think of this, and profit from it. We are all sinners ; and from time to time God sends His angel to ravish from our midst the fairest of our

flock, that by his sudden ending, the rest may confess their heavenly Father's power, and appease His wrath by repentance."

Though I was in no temper to receive her sermons, I remained silent, with downcast eyes and an air of submission and attention. Presently she cried, "Eh?" sharply, as though I had spoke, and then said :—

"I have ever believed, my dear, that for the sad there is no other comfortable minister but the Bible. For though men may talk, yet they discover their frailty in their speech. I'll not deny but there is much comfort in a gentle word, in a sympathetic tear, and in those tender murmurs of hope with which the true heart will know how to soften and sweeten the desolate thoughts of the mourner. But the Bible is God's messenger ; and it hath words writ in it that meet every kind of sorrow ; so that, when we read it aloud to one that laments, we know not what secret strokes (hidden to us who sorrow only through sympathy) may not be dulling the edge of despair and giving light to the mourner. For, my dear, 'tis my belief, that the Bible unto the mourner is like a full and powerful sunshine pouring upon an arid piece

of land. We know not what seeds lie hidden beneath, that shall presently blossom through those cheerful rays. And so I should recommend you not to forget the Bible in your endeavour to soothe poor Dolly; for there you will find words of consolation, of which your understanding, though never so shrewd and vigorous, would be incapable of prompting the expression."

I answered "that I would take care to profit from her ladyship's hint : though I believed Miss Aston's own perfect sweetness and soul of love, would prove to her better consolers than I could hope to be; and indeed, for the purposes of consolation, I believed my lady was far fitter than I; for her speech was full and pregnant, and her language was recommended by an experience that lent a sanctity to her instructions."

She was pleased to hear this; but answered, "Old age, my dear, has little cunning, and it needs cunning to console well. For you are to observe when the mourner is weary, that you may cease, or you will add to her pangs; and you are to observe when she is soothed, and so gently continue, lest recollection should again awake to howl fiercely at the light you have imparted."

Sorrow is likewise selfish ; and it will be distrustful unless your speech suggests as great a grief as you minister to, and this is hard to hit ; for how should I feel the loss of a lover like a mistress feels that loss ? Therefore, a kind of hypocrisy is needful, though, indeed, when so holily exercised, it takes another name. Youth hath sympathies which supply all these qualifications when directed by judgment ; but old age is vacant, and makes a poor comforter, especially to youth ; for it has outlived its joys, and can do no more than point to heaven ; whereas, the young heart, to be cheered, needs the light of the world as much as the light of paradise."

She got up, and set to walking about the room, talking to herself, and eyeing her finger-tips like I have seen a year-old child do. We remained silent a long time ; nor did I choose to interrupt the stillness ; for my own thoughts trooped upon me like the assault of an army ; and there was a mutiny in my mind which needed my utmost vigilance to quell, or I think emotion would have mastered me, and unfitted me for any part there was in store.

After half an hour, Dr. Aston came to the door

and beckoned me, then whispered, "would I go to Miss Aston." There was, he said, upon her a preternatural calm which rendered him very apprehensive; he had endeavoured to melt her to tears, for it was in nature, he said, so prodigious a grief should have vent, and begged me to go talk with her, as the voice of one of her own sex might achieve that which was denied to him.

I thereupon stepped up-stairs, and entering Miss Aston's room, found her in a chair, sitting as still as any statue in the house. 'Twas impossible to tell by the expression of her countenance what her feelings might be; for it was white and serene, though methought it borrowed a very piteous pathos from her blind eyes, which stared straight before her.

I set a chair by her side, and whispered I was come; on which she gave me her hand, with a smile that was more moving than a sob. I said Dr. Aston had recommended me to attend her; but added, if she chose, I would hold aloof, keeping myself in readiness when she should want me; for, I said, her grief was of a sacred kind, and I felt my presence to be as intrusive as though I saw an angel of God with her.

"Nay," said she: "do not leave me. I have a strong heart; and sure God has given it strength for this blow has not broken it, though indeed, I have no right to live now he is dead."

As I regarded her, so still and so brave in her great grief, so meek, so patient, so borne up, as it were, by an invisible hand, my soul felt stunned by a sudden sense of its deep guilt. Then, had I dared, would I have burst into tears. I would have knelt before her, and told her the true story of my deceit and of her lover's death. And sure I suffered as exquisitely as any strong man in agony. I began to speak some silly phrase of consolation; but my voice trembled, a fulness of tears pained my eyes, I did not dare continue.

"I will try," she presently said, "not to discover my sorrow. I would not give pain to my dear papa. And I know not why I should mourn my brave sweet boy; his noble spirit is in heaven, where he will await me, who would not care to linger beyond the time it may be God's will I should remain; though I would not pray for an early death, since I am to consider my father's heart more than mine; 'tis better I should suffer than he."

"Madam," I said, "you have a brave spirit. God's blessing is upon you. Sorrow will work its own cure, and will instruct your heart in consolation which will even raise higher yet the sweetness of your character; and by rendering your nature more lovely, fit it for the rapturous hour of your union with your love in a wedding eternity shall not dissolve."

She raised my hand and kissed it.

"Yes," she replied; "we shall meet in heaven. 'Tis in such moments as these that we can value heaven. Shame on those who would ravish that consolation from us, and leave such mourning hearts as mine no hope but the oblivion of the grave! Oh, Miss Boothby, he was dear to me as my faith. No one can tell how I loved him. His death seems a dream. I can not think of him as one who is to be away from me for ever. Had he married me, I had perhaps saved him from death. How often has his head been pillowed on my breast! Will the beating of my heart echo in his ear when he lies in the grave? But he loved me tenderly, and his spirit will come to soothe me. I have not lost him; Death has not taken him! How can he be

lost who lives in the memory—whose voice will never fade off the ear of my spirit—whose hand I can feel in mine—whose hair I can caress—whose kisses I can still feel?”

And letting fall my hand, she seemed to embrace some form present to the vision of her mind, and smiled softly, and put up her mouth as though some one should kiss it.

In this way the time passed; nor ever, though the name of her lover was always on her lips, could I see a tear fall from her eyes, though I watched her narrowly, that I might report to Dr. Aston. What I had told her, I believed was the truth: that Divine power was supporting her in this her great trial; for she spoke calmly and reasonably, without any of the suppressed madness which may sometimes be witnessed in grief that is too intense to be demonstrative. Yet, I could clearly see her sorrow was all the keener because of its calmness, and all the more to be apprehended because of its suppression. Her mind was too acute not to estimate her loss in its full significance. Hers was not an order of understanding that sorrow dulls, so that the revealing

of the whole truth is a slow process. Her soul had taken in all her woe at once; yet, such was her air, that had she died, she could not have looked more peaceful. 'Twas possible her blindness taught her endurance; 'twas possible the very greatness and sincerity of her love lent tranquillity to her pain. But of what avail is conjecture? Who shall plumb the mystery of such a woman's nature?





CHAPTER XV.

Miss Boothby leaves Wimpole Street.

SAVE before retiring to rest, when I looked in to see how she did, I saw no more of Miss Aston for that day. Both my lady and Dr. Aston attended very closely on her; and there came also to see her, a clergyman, whose earnest manner and solemn discourses, greatly recommended him to Miss Aston.

Next morning, Dr. Aston came to me early, and desired me not to see Miss Aston; "for," said he, "her fortitude had broke down in the night, and she had given a loose to her tears; so that this morning she was quite prostrate and needed the utmost precaution to procure her rest and silence." I appeared to be greatly concerned by my master's worn face and air, and entreated he would not find occasion for too much anxiety; for, I said that Miss Aston's grief would presently

expend itself, and she would awaken, as it were, to a new life, sobered indeed by this catastrophe, but rendered agreeable by the absence of those harassing doubts with which the procrastination of Mr. Bracebridge doubtless perplexed her.

He replied, "that though he was greatly shocked by Mr. Bracebridge's death, yet if he could but think Dolly would not take her loss too much to heart, he should not lament their separation ; for of late, there had grown up a keen distrust of that honour which Mr. Bracebridge had so much vaunted."

I could not but take notice, that as he continued conversing on this subject, Dr. Aston's air and voice assumed a tenderness such as I had never before witnessed in him when addressing me. I very narrowly considered it before I pronounced upon its nature ; but I found that I was not deceived : that even his eyes proved a kind of orators who spoke a language of approval. My heart at this discovery beat with violent emotions of joy, and I began to ponder how I should set to work to heighten and confirm that behaviour of tenderness of which I witnessed rather the hint than the expression. But when he was gone,

I reflected that I must not be too quick to jump to the conclusion of my hope. I was to consider that this tenderness might be occasioned by the apparent great solicitude I manifested for his daughter's health and peace, also for his own; and then the being no stranger to the history of the affair that had led to this issue, might strengthen his confidence in me, and raise me in his estimation as deserving a greater softness of speech than is used to be held to dependents.

At noon, my lady told me I might go sit with Miss Aston awhile; so repairing to her chamber, I found her abed, lying very white and still amid the transparencies of the elegant bed-drapery. She smiled when she heard my whisper; and I remarked that hers was a smile from which all its familiar brightness was fled, though its tenderness remained to make it exceedingly melancholy. I particularly observed her face to remark how far grief had affected the lineaments; but the wind beating upon marble had not wrought a less change. Indeed, no sign of her sorrow was perceptible until she smiled. Her open fair brow was serene; her mouth was firm; her countenance calm; but the whole was whiter

than I ever remember to have seen the human skin. Her neck and ears seemed to blend with the complexion of the sheets ; and, but for the veins in her thin transparent hands, I had not distinguished them from the white linen of her gown.

I begged her in a soft voice to acquaint me if I could do anything to divert her ; on which she, in a feeble whisper, desired I would look in her boudoir, and fetch a small volume of sermons. I brought the book, and at her bidding fell to reading the opening discourse, which treated in a very pathetic manner of the value of sorrow as an aid to faith, and on the necessity of human suffering, that justice among men might be done Him who came upon this earth to suffer for us all. She listened with great earnestness to what I read : and when I was done, took my hand and kissed it, thanking me for what I had read, and desiring that I, from time to time, would continue reading in that book ; for she found great satisfaction in listening, and, she affirmed, she did not doubt it would in time discipline her mind to bear her sorrow with that spirit of gratitude which is the truest mode in which a human being can prove her love for her heavenly Father.

As I was leaving her, I met a footman, who requested I would attend Dr. Aston in the library. Believing he desired some report of his daughter, I stepped below with a cheerful countenance, designing to inform him that I had hope of restoring her peace of mind ere many days should pass.

My master was seated in an armchair, and his face wore such an air of confusion, pain, and disappointment, as satisfied me something of great moment had happened. So, not without difficulty to suppress my agitation, I took the chair into which he motioned me, and screwed up my nerves to meet the worst.

"Madam," he said, with an uncommon sternness of manner, "I lament to have to discharge a duty for which I have as little taste, as I had little belief you would ever occasion it. I have summoned you to say that your duties here are at an end."

I fixed my eyes stedfastly upon him; for believing he had discovered my complicity in Mr. Bracebridge's death, I was resolved to meet his animadversions as unmoved as the Cleopatra that stood a spectator of this interview.

He continued, "I would not be so unmanly as to reproach you with the bitterness your deceit merits ; for in dismissing you from my house, I have done all it is incumbent on me to do. Yet I would inquire how you could find the heart to betray your friends (for we have been your friends) by engaging in a deceit to which no one could have descended in whose breast lurked the faintest spark of honour ?"

"Sir," I said, "will you please to acquaint me with my crime."

His eyes flashed as they stared upon my hard face.

"Do you need it repeated, madam ? Since you wish to accumulate your bitterness, you shall ; and I wish you at least this much good : that the lesson you will now learn may prove a light to conduct you henceforth in the road of honour."

Then withdrawing a letter from his pocket, he presented it to me, together with an inclosure. I opened the first letter, and read as is here writ :

"DEAR SIR,—The great wrong my son has done you and yours compels from me the only reparation it lies in my power to offer : that of suffering

neither shame nor grief to restrain me from laying the whole truth before you.

“I blush for the memory of the dead.

“From whom he inherited his vices, I know not; my only consolation is to feel that death has prevented your sweet and noble girl from allying herself with one who was less than the dirt of the earth in comparison with her.

“Accept, my dear friend, this language as an illustration of pride bowed down and crushed by the enormities of my son. The letter that accompanies this, I found in his room among other papers. It seems to have been written on the morning of his death. ’Tis a duty I owe you to bring you acquainted with its contents; for by it you will observe you have been fostering a snake on your hearth that has been quick to bite. You will also accept it as a wish on my part, to show you how very much, I am,

“Dear Sir,

“Your obliged and sorrowing servant,

“CHARLES BRACEBRIDGE.

I set this letter on the table without a word; and opening the next, read what here appears—

"MY DEAR DICK,—This is to get you to do me a great service. You are to know I am acquainted with a handsome miss, who has got to be Miss Aston's companion on my recommendation. I have not tried for her favours by the ordinary process, because she has a wild angry eye that would keep Old Harry himself at bay. I profess I consider her a deceitful pretty minx, whose passion for me is mimicked, and whose heart is rather set on my title and fortune, when the old one shall be dead, than upon your servant's person. But counterfeit love is as good to me as the real when I am without sincerity.

"Oh, Dick, you would be ravished by her cunning! To see her languishing looks when I am seated next Miss Aston, who luckily can't see 'em!

"And now to business. You are to know that this wench and I are supposed to be betrothed; but as it isn't my design to lose Miss Aston, so I have made the hussey believe, if we are discovered, I shall be driven from Wimpole Street, which would put an end to our interviews. Under this mask I can continue making love to Dolly, without exciting Lætitia's resentment. Lætitia

Boothby is her name ; how d'ye like the taste on't ? 'Tis plain the hussey will cut me if I don't marry her ; so I want you to do for me again what you was so obliging to do for me with Moll Randolph. I want you to marry us. I'll hire the canonicals ; and if you can contrive to be in town on Thursday at noon, meet me at the *Castle and Bear*, where I'll set my scheme before you.

“ In your last, you spoke of Moll. My answer is, she hath consented to be bought off from troubling me at my marriage. Zounds ! What concern the creature has occasioned me ! T'other night she was cursing me for an hour together, and renewing her old dreadful threat, to be present at my marriage with Dolly, or of calling on Dr. Aston and telling him the history of her wedding. As you know, this creature has been the cause of my delay in marrying Dolly. But at last she has consented to take my bond to pay her fifty pounds a year when I am married, which is to run till she gets her an husband. Why she's agreed to terms is, her child's dead of the small-pox. Now might I marry Dolly ; but I can't foreswear my bright-eyed Lætitia yet. And here you cry, ' Hang it, Jack, having got rid

of one, why will you burden yourself with another?' My answer is, Dick,—you shall see her, and then you'll cease to wonder. As to ridding me of her, when I'm disposed to turn to Dolly (or rather, her fortune), I'll hit on some design, I'll warrant you. There's many a genteel young blade I could pass on her as a man of quality, by hiring him rooms, giving him a guinea in his pocket, and a suit of silk, who'll make her a good husband for ten guineas. So I am under no concern."

Here the letter broke off. I handed it with the other to Dr. Aston, biting my lip till I tasted blood.

"Well, madam," he said, "are the contents of this letter the truth?"

"What refers to my betrothal is true, sir."

"So you were engaged to be married to him, though under a promise to me to push forward his marriage with my daughter?"

I hung my head. He paused, apparently bewildered. Then, pulling out his purse, he counted out ten guineas, which he pushed over to me.

"There," said he, "is more than your salary. But I would not have you return to want and

infamy. This money may keep you in honesty until you procure another place."

I took the money ; and, standing up, addressed him thus :—

"It is not, sir, because I wish to retain this situation that I desire you to hear me. I am sorry for what I have done. I grievously deplore the wrong of which I have been guilty. My father is a poor man, and he has not the means to help me. I have to depend on myself to make my way in the world. Mr. Bracebridge courted me ; I did not court him. He swore his passion was honourable and sincere, and I believed him. He entreated me to keep his love a secret, and I did so. I did not repel him, because he was a handsome young fellow ; and loving me, as I believed, truly, I thought he would make me a good husband. And as I had my fortune to make, it was not in my nature to drive him from me, for he professed to offer me his title and fortune on his father's death ; and honest (because wealthier) women than I would have seen no dishonour in entertaining his proposals. I love Miss Aston well, sir. It was poverty—the utter barrenness of my future—put me upon

wronging her. Do you think, sir, your reproaches could add to my mortification? See how he would have treated me, who have forfeited my place for him, and betrayed those whose kindness I shall never recall without tears. I would not have you think less harshly on me than my dishonour merits; but your severity may be mitigated by recollecting that it was my poverty and the obscurity of my future that first occasioned me to receive his addresses; and that my disappointment must be keen enough to appease the deepest anger that could be possessed against me."

Then, making him a humble curtsey, I stepped from the room; and, mounting to my bedchamber, got together my narrow wardrobe, and left the house.





CHAPTER XVI.

Miss Boothby returns to her papa.

MY rage was great; my mortification keen; my heart hopeless. No tears came to my relief; yet I seemed like one whose eyes are veiled with tears. I called a chair, and, stepping into it, bade the men carry me to the Haymarket. To what other destination was I to direct them? I took no note of the spectacle of the streets; my soul lay burning within me, and the fumes thereof seemed to cloud my brain, and leave me to the guidance of the mere mechanick instincts.

When I was arrived, I went to Mr. Boothby's room, but found him absent. I sat for a while, with my head upon my hands, striving to unravel the web of my misfortunes—to put aside the curtain of despair, that I might see what lay beyond.

Blow after blow had been struck me in rapid succession. First, my lover was dead, which ended the dream of aggrandisement contained

in my betrothal. Next, I was to learn that the man I had trusted was a base villain, whose love was a snare for my destruction, whose very passion was an impeachment of my virtue, whose design upon me was as odious as was ever yet writ in history or poetry. Then I was to be ignominiously dismissed from the situation in which I had promised myself the ease of many years,—which I had considered as the smooth channel that was to float me to the great ocean on which I should ride, as gay and handsome a bark as ever flew a pennon. And, lastly, I was to lose the esteem and the company of the man whom, with care, by the exercise of deference, sympathy, and tenderness, I might one day have made my husband.

It took me long to rally. I heard the clocks striking, yet could not rid me of my stupour. Then presently I was deafened by eager questionings : how was I to live ? what should I do ? to whom was I to turn for succour ?

Wearied by my sufferings, my eyelids grew heavy ; my head sank upon the table, and I slumbered.

I dreamt a dream.

Methought two figures stood before me. One was lean, famished, and hollow-eyed ; her yellow skin showed through rags ; her fangs were black : she made a ghastly presence. Next her stood a handsome figure, sumptuously apparelled ; her cheeks coated with red, which gave uncommon brilliancy to her eyes ; her teeth white and regular, and her hair dressed high, in the newest mode. She that was lean called herself Virtue. She that was painted called herself Vice. Each bid me follow her. Virtue pointed to a barren prospect, drenched with rain, beaten by gales, and told me my way would lie through such desolate regions, but by a path that would lead me to heaven. Vice pointed to elegant chambers and silken couches, to gallants of quality, and the thousand diversions of the town. To her I was eagerly addressing myself, when I was awaked by the entrance of Mr. Boothby.

“ My God, child !” he cried, when I lifted my face ; “ I thought you was dead.”

“ I had like to be dead,” said I. “ I have gone through enough to kill me.”

“ How ! Sure ’tis not known how he came by *his* death ! Speak !” he cried.

"No," said I; "nothing is known but this—that Mr. Bracebridge was my lover; and this discovery has lost me my place."

He rapped out an oath; then, looking on me sternly, cried, "'Tis your fault. Why did you connect yourself with the fop? Was not my scheme for you concerning Dr. Aston good enough, that you should defeat it by gallanting with an empty-headed beau?"

"I know not."

"Do you think *I* can support you? Give me leave to say I have not broke fast these twenty hours. Did Dr. Aston give you any money?"

"He gave me ten guineas."

"Why then," he cried, his face clearing, "if that be so, we'll not let the future depress us. Ten guineas is no contemptible sum, let me tell you. By your leave, I'll order a dinner and a bottle. You'll see your way clearer when your hunger's appeased."

Then, calling the maid, he gave her his orders; and, sitting down, bid me acquaint him with the particulars of my dismissal. This I did; and I noticed, whilst I proceeded, that his face grew blank but for a scowl; though when I came to

the ten guineas, the scowl cleared away. He rated me roundly, with many coarse imprecations, for my perversity in not sticking to his design; but the dinner arriving cut him short. He made me drink some sack; and being half-starved, imagined I must needs be starved too; but I could not eat. I watched him as he sat over his food, and could not but remark how vastly misfortune had coarsened him. There was an air of defiance in his face that was clearly occasioned by the desperate nature of his thoughts. Having witnessed that air, I felt I should never be surprised to hear of his ending at Tyburn. Necessity had thrust him beyond the bounds of humanity; he had bid adieu to society and its laws; and like a dog that has lost its master, he was become ferocious by kicks, by insults, and by starvation.

I learnt from him that I might have a chamber next his for two shillings a week; and this I resolved to rent. He went abroad after four o'clock and left me to myself; and I, sickened by solitude and by that inanity of mind which hopelessness induces, went abroad likewise, designing to divert myself by looking into the

shops. I walked until I was tired, then returned; and finding Mr. Boothby still absent, ordered a dish of tea, over which I sat until it was near eight. I then paced restlessly about the room. Perceiving myself face to face with Necessity, I sought to contemplate her steadily, and witness with what success I might combat her. But even in imagination she proved victorious, for she drove me from one refuge to another, until she left me nothing but the pit of vice in which to shelter myself from the merciless shower of her darts.

The hours stealing on, and Mr. Boothby not returning, I went to bed; bidding the maid tell Mr. Boothby when he was arrived, that I was too fatigued to await him. Though my narrow bed was miserable and comfortless, I had no sooner entered it than sleep descended to blot from life the misery with which the hours were now filled.

When I awaked it was broad daylight. Not knowing the hour, I rose and dressed myself, then entered Mr. Boothby's room. He was not there. I opened the door, and called to the maid, who presently came. I inquired for Mr. Boothby,

and she replied by handing me a letter. I drew to the window and read this :—

“MY DEAR LÆTITIA,—Hunger has compelled me to an action of which no other necessity could have made me guilty. I have robbed you of the money you received from Dr. Aston ; but have not taken all, for you will find a guinea remaining, which will meet your present necessities. With your parts and beauty you are sure to prosper. If such a father’s blessing as mine can avail, thou hast it. With this money I go to seek a fortune in America ; thou shalt never be troubled by me again. Yet I would not have you forget that I am your father, that you may not curse me for this deed. Want has brought me to what I am. I have not fortitude enough to meet death by starvation. May God forgive me my past, and have this pity on me, that my last act shall not ruin my child. Farewell for ever.—THY BROKEN-HEARTED FATHER.”

I read this letter, barely comprehending it. But the truth broke on me when I thrust my hand into my pocket, and found there but a single guinea. He had doubtless entered my chamber

during the night, and plundered me of my little fortune. Oh my God! did my sins deserve this last stroke? What should I do now? My guinea would soon be gone, and I should be alone in the great city, without a creature to give me bread or shelter!

I wept as though my heart would break. I stared wildly about me, as tho' by searching I should find a key to release me from this dungeon of my misery.

Well now the wheel of fortune had brought me to the bottom, and its next revolution must raise me, for depress me further it could not.

As I pondered, it entered my mind that by laying my misery before Miss Aston, she would take pity on me. 'Twas a happy idea! It might have entered with a ray of sunlight that broke through the clouds. She was the soul of love, of pity, of purity; yes, I would make my appeal to her. So running to the door, I called for the maid to bring me paper and ink; and seating myself, poured out my whole soul in a letter.

I said I had been robbed of my ten guineas (though I would not say by whom), by which I was deprived of the means of subsistence; that

Mr. Boothby had left the country, so that I was now without a friend ; that unless I speedily procured me a situation I should starve ; that I deeply repented me of my sins, and that nothing but my terror of vice, into whose jaws necessity threatened to cast me, gave me presumption to address one whom I had so sorely and irreparably injured.

Much was added to prove my contrition ; and again I repeated that unless she assisted me, I should be obliged to fly to vice for support.

This letter being written satisfactorily to myself, I gave the maid a piece of silver to deliver it within half an hour ; and, almost overwhelmed by the tumult of my hopes and fears, prepared to await the issue.

At half an hour after four in the afternoon there came a messenger from Dr. Aston who desired to see me. Unwilling that any servant of my master should be admitted to a sight of my squalid lodging, I stepped downstairs, and there beheld Dr. Aston's footman, who handed me a packet which, said he, his master had ordered should be delivered to no one but me. I flew upstairs, and tearing open the packet, drew forth ten guineas and a letter, which ran thus :—

“ Dr. Aston has been instructed by his daughter to acquaint Miss Boothby that she has received her letter. Miss Aston is unwilling (by withdrawing such aid as may be in her power to exert) to complicate that misery into which Miss Boothby's errors have plunged her. Dr. Aston therefore will write at once to a charitable kinswoman in the country, representing Miss Boothby's case to her, and soliciting her to find her a situation in her household. No reference to the past shall render difficult the respect which it is in Miss Boothby's power to command, if she will but remember that God who is the Father is also the Judge of mankind ; and that happiness in this world and eternal joy in the next are to be procured only by a faithful adhesion to the spirit of that religion which places honour and sincerity among the virtues. That Miss Boothby's present bitterness may not be increased by hope to terminate in disappointment, Miss Aston holds out this promise : that should her present application fail, others will be made on Miss Boothby's behalf, and persevered in, until Miss Aston's efforts are crown'd with a happy consequence. Ten guineas are enclosed to supply the pressing necessities of

the moment; and if in a week's time no situation is procur'd, a regular supply of money will be despatch'd, until a fortunate application enables Miss Boothby to dispense with such aid."

Not since the death of my mother, had I ever gone on my knees to pray, except at the church that the Astons attended, where prayer with me was rather a ceremony than an oblation. But after reading this letter, my heart melted and rained down tears from my eyes. I sank upon my knees, and fixing my eyes on heaven, pour'd forth my gratitude to God for His goodness, with deep and piteous entreaties that He would give me the power to walk stedfastly in the path recommended me by my beloved mistress.

From this prayer I arose refresh'd, like one that hath been long sick, but who feels the strong sense of lusty life and jocund health returning. And sure there is a virtue in prayer that is above the reach of the healing arts; for it ministers to that which no medicine can touch; and like the blessed sunshine upon sickly plants, imparts life to instincts which would for ever remain motionless in the chill withering atmosphere of scepticism.

In less than a week there came from Dr. Aston,

dictated by his daughter, a letter, saying that she had procured me the post of housekeeper and companion to her kinswoman, my Lady Cheriton, who lived at Exeter in Devonshire ; and that I was privileged to enter upon my duties so soon as I might make it convenient to do so. And the letter concluded with a prayer for my future and an entreaty that I would not neglect her father's and her name in my worship.

On the 22nd of September in the year of our Lord 1772, I departed from the metropolis, and four days after reached my new home, where I have since lived happily, and where (I pray God) I may prove so deserving as to be continued.

LÆTITIA-LAVINIA BOOTHBY.

At the end of the manuscript appears the following :—

“ Mrs. Boothby came to my service in 1788, recommended to me by Lady Cheriton, who was long my intimate friend.

“ I have read the foregoing attentively, and am not surprised at its contents ; for I never beheld Mrs. Boothby without imagining her a woman that had lived through some severe trial, which

had effectually broken a spirit that might have been in its youth at once proud and designing. But whatever might have been her past, both the character I received with her from Lady Cheriton, and her own conduct during the time she was in my service, proved her a woman of wit tempered by docility, of understanding directed by judgment, and of fidelity chastened by obedience. She was a kind, a charitable, a virtuous woman, in her life exemplary, and in her end pious. She died in the year 1800 of a virulent fever which she had caught whilst nursing my son, who recovered through her patient care. She lies in the parish churchyard ; and at her request these words from the psalmist were inscribed on her stone :—

“ ‘ Blessed be God, which hath not turned away from my prayer, nor His mercy from me.’

1809.

“ LAURA CAVENDISH.”



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